

TO HERO

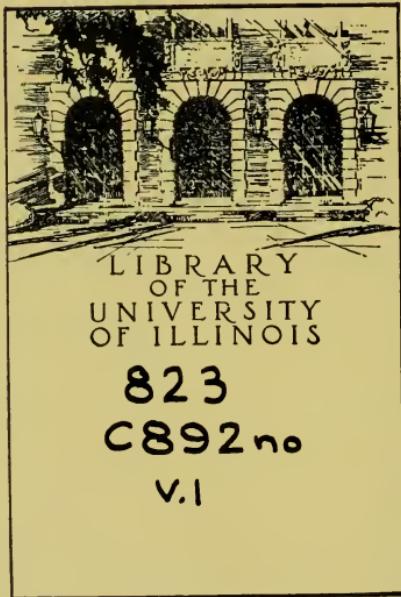
BY JOHN

A MAN

John Tammes

Illustrated by the author

TO HERO





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NO HERO, BUT A MAN.

NO HERO, BUT A MAN.

A Novel.

BY

ANNIE THOMAS

(*Mrs Pender-Cudlip*),

AUTHOR OF

'DENIS DONNE,' 'THE HONOURABLE JANE,' 'A GIRL'S FOLLY,'
'UTTERLY MISTAKEN,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO

ISABEL CONRY,

WITH WARM AND SINCERE GRATITUDE FOR INNUMERABLE
KINDNESSES, THIS STORY IS

Dedicated

BY HER FRIEND

THE AUTHOR.

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NO HERO, BUT A MAN.



CHAPTER I.

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

THREE hansoms dashed up smartly and simultaneously to the great western departure entrance at Paddington, and, presently, after a breathless rush for tickets and luggage labels, the three fares, all strangers to one another, found themselves the sole occupants

of a first-class carriage, in a train bound for the extreme west country.

The train was steaming out of the station before the trio had recovered their respective breaths, or were able to take any but the most casual notice of each other. Then, as their pantings ceased, and their flurry subsided, the attention of two of them was withdrawn from themselves and each other and concentrated on the third.

He was a well-grown, fair, florid man of forty, with light blue, prominent eyes, and a mouthful of large, white, well-kept teeth, which were bordered by extremely red gums. He was not a handsome man, but there was about him a power of attraction which many a far better-looking man

lacks. He talked and laughed loudly and much.

When his two companions had looked at him as long as was consistent with the canons of civility, they turned covert glances upon each other, and this is what they saw.

In the right-hand corner, with her face to the engine, a lady, whose age might be anything from twenty-five to thirty-five. Her face was pale, complexion medium, neither fair nor dark, but creamy, and free from blot or blemish. Eyes, long, dark, grey; eyebrows and lashes, black, long, and well defined; nose, slightly stuck out and irregular in outline, inquisitive rather than contemplative; mouth well modelled, flexible lipped, sensitive and loving.

Her hair, which was very dark brown, was skilfully twisted, in an indescribable way, very neatly round a well-held head. On it she wore a graceful white felt boat-shaped hat, with a white wing in it. Her dress was white serge, exquisitely cut, fitting her slim, well-developed figure to perfection. Her long, slender hands were cased in white Swede gloves. By her side, confined by leather straps, was a dust-cloak of silver-grey silk. This was a deliciously cool arrangement with which to travel on this broiling August day. She made the young man who observed her think, with joyful anticipation, of the refreshing "white horses" which would probably greet him on his entrance into Cawsand Bay that evening.

The man who contemplatively re-

garded her thus from the opposite corner was rather well worth looking at himself. Like the florid-haired and complexioned child of the sun (who has already been described, and whose round, projecting blue eyes were roving complacently over the delicate face and form of his lady fellow-traveller), this man was well grown. He was equally tall, standing at least six feet in his stockings, and, additionally, he was better built. His shoulders were squarer, he moved with broader, freer ease than the blonde man did; and the lady in the corner, who saw everything, though she looked at nothing, noticed that he was better kempt about the hair and moustache, better groomed about the collar, cuffs and necktie, than the other one.

They were hardly clear of the station—London's grimy chimneys were still in sight—when the blonde man began to open his heart—and mouth.

‘Phew!’ he began with a whistle that made the lady start, and the other man wish to knock him on the head. ‘Just saved this train by the skin o’ my teeth, which aren’t so bad, considering I’ve been trying ’em on buffalo hide for the last ten years. ‘You had to run for it, too, I saw,’ he added, impartially addressing both his fellow-passengers.

‘I don’t know why I “ran” for it, the other man laughed languidly. ‘I’d just as soon be here as there, or anywhere else.’

‘Going as far as Plymouth?’ the blonde man asked.

'Further,' the other man answered laconically.

'Well, now, I am going as far as Plymouth, and you'd never guess (so I won't keep you in suspense) why I'm going,' said the blonde man benevolently. 'I'm the last of my race, so I had the pleasure of being informed a day or two ago by the family lawyer. A damned bad race it seems to have been; but I am the last of it to-day, so I'm going to start it fresh, with more moral and physical capital, d-yer see? and make the name of Harlby one to conjure with again in the West.'

He smiled, and shook himself like a great affable, Newfoundland dog pining to save some wandering, lost one; and the lady in the carriage

looked at him sympathetically, but curiously, as she said,—

‘How sweet it must be to be the last surviving representative of an old race, and to feel that you can kill that race altogether by dying yourself, if it is ignoble, or resuscitate it by living a manly, noble, God-fearing life.’

‘By Jove! madam, you’re the woman to make a man do the last that you’ve said!’ exclaimed the blonde man, and the other man fidgeted restlessly in his corner. It seemed to him that the conversation was taking a crude, uncivilised turn.

‘You counsel suicide or saintliness, madam,’ he began, looking at her out of a pair of penetrating brown

eyes that reminded her of moss agates.

'On the contrary, I counsel common sense,' she said quietly.

Then she took a yellow-back from her travelling-bag, and neither man got another look or word from her until the train stopped at Bath, where she got out, after one brief glance at the Gladstone which was on the seat close to the florid man, on which was painted in white the words 'Herbert Harlby.'

By the side of the other man there was a roll of newspapers and a silver flask, on which, without thinking about it, she noticed the initials 'H. H.' As she stepped out on to the platform she straightway forgot all about her fellow-

travellers, for she was met by friends who were anxious to hear what her life had been since she went out of theirs, five years ago, to be English governess in a French family in Paris.

‘Dear, sleepy, hot old Bath. It looks just the same as it did when I left you five years ago,’ she said, as a couple of nice-looking women encompassed her round about, and gave her words and hand-shakes, that she felt to be too warm for the weather.

‘And you, Frances, look five years younger than when you went away,’ the elder of the two ladies said, admiringly gazing with flattering approval at the well-turned-out and speckless traveller.

'Thank you, Aunt John; it's pleasant to have one's efforts at self-preservation appreciated, even by a woman,' the lady in white said affably.

Then she carefully counted her travelling gear, and was presently seated in an open carriage behind a pair of fat, comfortable horses, rolling towards the residence of her two aunts, Myrtle Lodge, in one of Bath's highest and breeziest suburbs.

'It will do us both good to have a young element in the house again. Jane and I are so happy and comfortable, and so sympathetic in our habits and tastes, that we are in danger of growing fat and lazy,' the lady, who had been addressed as 'Aunt John,' said cheerily.

'Yes, Frances, it is a good thing

you have come home to stir us up, and give us something to think of besides ourselves,' Jane Woodford, the maiden member of the sisterly firm, put in briskly; 'not but what we have plenty of society, my dear. Don't fancy that we lead dull or stagnant lives; but you will give us fresh interests, and bring a breath of new life into our home.'

Frances was touched to the extent of colouring faintly with pleasure.

'You dear, kind things,' she said with more animation than she had displayed hitherto; 'you want to make me feel that I am not a self-invited intruder in your sweet, happy home. Well, my dear aunts, I promise you not to feel it, but to be just exactly as glad to be there at rest, as you, I know, are

to have me. But—! don't be disappointed ! I shall not be with you long, not for more than a month or two.

'Frances!' burst from the lips of both the aunts, 'you're not going out again? You're not going to deprive us of the pleasure of doing what is right by our only brother's only child?'

'Dear Aunt John, I *am* going out again, but not in the way you mean. I am going to be married.'

'My dearest child, *not* to a Frenchman, I trust?'

Frances laughed, and shook her head.

'No, indeed, to the veriest John Bull out. A "yeoman," I suppose he would be called. A gentleman farmer, who has a small estate of his own,

and hires a lot of land besides. A dear fellow! not at all the kind of man I meant to marry when I first thought of marriage, but a dear, straightforward, good-tempered, manly fellow, who will take care of me, and be kind to me, and make me behave myself.'

Aunt John sighed.

'My dear, they all promise all that before marriage' she said softly.

'Didn't Uncle John keep his promise?' she asked laughingly.

'He was straightforward enough, and he made me behave myself; but the less said about his temper the better, my dear. He may have considered it good; but I used to be astonished to see how, strong man though he was, he gave way under the weekly bills.'

Now, tell us what is the name of your future husband? and where does he live?’

‘His name is Treville, and he lives at a place called Wingates, three miles from a station. That’s the awful part of it. Three miles from the means of getting away rapidly from the region.’

‘But you will have a carriage of some sort, surely, dear?’

‘Oh, yes, I shall do very well,’ Frances Woodford said, with a sudden change of manner. ‘Don’t let us talk about him or my marriage any more. I felt bound to tell you of it; but I am past the age when a girl feels a rapturous delight in being garrulous about her engagement.’

‘The deeper the happiness the less

one speaks about it,' Aunt John—otherwise Mrs Gray—said, looking from her niece to her sister for the approbation which she felt sure such a thoroughly irreproachable solution of Frances's silence deserved.

'Exactly so, Aunt John; if I remember rightly, you spoke very little about the happiness you enjoyed with Uncle John.'

There was the slightest possible shadow of a sneer upon Frances Woodford's lip as she dealt her verbal stab; but Aunt John did not see it. The late Mr Gray had departed this life long enough for the memory of all that had not been 'sweet and pleasant' in him to have become very indistinct, while his rare virtues had gained lustre.

'You are quite right, my dear, I never boasted or pretended that my husband was better than other men,' Aunt John remarked cheerfully; and Frances was sincere as she replied,—

'Common-sense is evidently an attribute of the Woodfords. How delightful it is to be here again.'

'And, see! the myrtles are in finer flower than they have been in for years. I said to Jane this morning, it must mean that there will be a wedding in the family soon,' Aunt John said, as the carriage rolled between the huge shrubs which guarded the gates on either side, and gave its name to the pretty verandahed house whose French windows were wide open, giving

glimpses of a fascinatingly cool and prettily furnished interior.

'Welcome home, Frances,' the widow lady said, kissing her niece, affectionately. 'You must let me write and ask Mr Neville to come and stay with us. Of course, you have his photograph? I am quite anxious to see what our future nephew is like.'

'He is one of the best men in the world, take my word for that. I am not an enthusiast, as you know, so you may believe me when I declaim on the sterling worth of my betrothed. But he is not beautiful to look upon,' she added with a laugh. 'I have no likeness of him — excepting the one that is engraved on my heart.'

The aunts looked at each other uneasily ; and said no more about one of the best men in the world to their niece that day.

CHAPTER II.

TREVILLE'S NEW NEIGHBOUR.

WHEN Frances Woodford got out at Bath, both the men whom she left in the carriage watched her with interest, till she became absorbed in the throng on the platform, and was lost to sight.

Then the florid man, who had described himself as the last of his race, commenced speaking volubly, while he rolled a cigarette with nervous fingers.

'Stunning woman, that ! in the market to ! She shall be Mrs Herbert Harlby before the year is much older.'

'What the devil are you talking about, sir?' the other man asked haughtily.

Everything annoyed him in connection with this fellow-traveller of his, who breathed hard, threw out heat, and spoke with loose flippancy of a woman who had won admiring regard from the quieter and more fastidious man himself.

'I'm talking about the lovely creature in snowy robes who has just left us — took off her glove for a minute, and I saw she had no wedding-ring on. I tell you, sir, there was no damned bar of gold

intervening between me and my fixed determination to make that woman my wife. I'm the last of my race. I am going down to interview a cursed lawyer, who won't let me have a sou of the money that's mine till he has seen the papers, which are my sole proof that I am the real man, and which are in my big trunk in the luggage van at the present moment. I have a dog, too, in the dog van. Such a fine fellow! lamb to me, lion to every other d—d fellow who tries to take liberties with him. Answers to the name of "Cavae," sir. Cavae means "hurry," you know, if you know anything about it, and my dog—greyhound, touch of kangaroo hound in him, is always ready to "hurry

up" and—I say! are we in a tunnel, or is the light out?'

'You're not well,' the other man cried, starting up and crossing to the assistance of his fellow-passenger.

'I am well, I tell you. It's the heat. I'll go to sleep, and dream of the woman who shall be Mrs Herbert Harlby.'

He put his head against the cushioned back, pressing hard against it, as if he could find no support. His eyes closed, he had turned very pallid. The other man looked at him with distaste, and determined to change into another carriage at Bristol. But at Bristol, as his obnoxious companion still slept calmly, he changed his mind, remained where he was, and fell asleep himself for hours.

When he woke, a quick glance showed him that the train was nearing a large town. Looking at his watch and time-table, he saw that it was the city of Exeter, and he half resolved to remain there for the night, forfeit the remainder of his ticket, and go on to Cornwall the following day. His fellow-traveller would probably wake up, and would want to talk and render himself generally obnoxious.

As he thought this, he looked unwillingly at his companion. The latter had not moved, there was no sound of breathing, the face that had been so florid, looked like clay.

‘Great Heaven, he is dead !’

The words were shrieked out as the train stopped, and in another moment

the door and the carriage were surrounded and filled by an eager, gasping, curious and horror-stricken crowd.

Some station-official asked presently, —‘Which was the dead man’s luggage?’ and the man, upon whom was the awful curse of a terrible temptation, pointed (he could not speak) to the paper roll and the silver cigarette case.

‘Then *you* are the owner of this?’ the official said, pointing to the Gladstone, and a constable immediately made a note of the name.

‘You will be wanted at the inquest, Mr Harlby,’ he said. ‘Have you come alone with the poor gentleman all the way? I see he’s come from Paddington?’

‘Yes, alone all the way,’ the one addressed as Mr Harlby said quickly.

He had a dim idea that by making this statement he was saving that sweet, delicate-looking woman, who had left them at Bath, from the horrors of the publicity attending an inquest.

There is no need to dwell on those horrors here. The coroner found that the gentleman, name unknown, whose initials were 'H. H.', and who had no luggage, save a small portmanteau in the rack, containing a few articles of clothing, and a silver cigarette case thus marked, had died of natural causes, and the jury found a verdict to that effect. No one appeared in response to numerous advertisements to endeavour to identify the dead man; so he was buried at Exeter, and much commendation was bestowed upon Mr Herbert Harlby for the generous

way in which he came forward and stood the expenses of the funeral of the unknown, whose death had been such a shock to him.

Immediately after the funeral, he went on to Plymouth with the greyhound Cavae, the luggage that was marked Herbert Harlby, and the credentials that substantially established his right to a fine property on the Cornish side of the Tamar.

Frances Woodford, in her aunt's bright, sunny Bath home, read of the sudden death in the railway carriage, of the inquest, and evidence of Mr Herbert Harlby. She remembered the latter well, and thought what a pity it was the florid, aggressively confidential man had not been the one to leave the world with such startling sudden-

ness, instead of the other man, whose appearance and manner had distinctly interested her. It rather staggered her when she read that Mr Herbert Harlby had stated at the inquest that he had been the unfortunate unknown's sole companion all the way.

'He stared at me so, that it's not possible he can have forgotten me,' she said to Aunt John; and the latter conjectured that probably his design had been to spare her (Frances) unnecessary pain and trouble.

'I should hardly think him so chivalrous as that,' Frances said; and then she dismissed the subject from her mind.

She had a great many things of far more importance than the sudden death of a stranger to think about in these

days. In the first place, she was getting together the most interesting collection of clothes which a woman ever acquires — namely, her wedding trousseau; and as she was fastidious by nature, and economical through stress of circumstances on compulsion, the work of selecting materials and having them made the most of, and constructed to the best advantage, was an arduous one; though her best efforts were ably supplemented, and her most intricate ideas admirably carried out by that firm in Milsom Street, Messrs Kring & Co., who are such liberal instructors in the fine art of dress.

In addition to the mental strain and physical toil, which were involved in the fulfilment of this pleasing task of outfitting herself for her embarkation on the

unknown ocean of matrimony, Frances had to think how best to treat the rather delicate situation of a pre-nuptial visit to her aunts' house of Mr Treville himself.

She felt prophetically that, elderly as these ladies were, they would expect more demonstration of affection, to say the least of it, in the relations between John Treville and herself than either were at all disposed to display.

(‘I know him; he is good and honourable, and will be kind to me while I deserve his kindness.’ Pray God I may never forfeit my *right* to it; for if I did— Well! I won’t speculate on what might happen if I did. But I know Aunt John has conjured up a vision of a superior being, who would be much more lenient

to any errors of judgment his dependants make, than John Treville would ever be to mine.’)

She would say this jestingly to herself one hour; and the next, after another interview with the aunts, she would be inclined to think, that if anything went wrong or fell short of what was anticipated in such a sanguine spirit by the hospitable ladies, when the lover, who was already the family man of the future in their eyes, arrived, then it would be her own (Frances') fault.

And this feeling made her rather humble.

All the household arrangements went like well-regulated clock-work at Myrtle Lodge. The carpets always came up, and well-beeswaxed and turpentined

floors reigned in their stead at the right moment in early summer. In late autumn the carpets went down again, neither a day too soon nor too late. Both cleanliness and Condyl's Fluid had it all their own way in the house in the summer months, and these resigned gracefully in favour of warmth, comfort, cosiness and equal cleanliness in winter. Frances felt the beauty, peace and harmony of it all, and shivered at the thought of disturbing it vicariously.

(‘I should have been wiser to have let them see him first in his wedding-garment, and immediately after that as their host at Wingates. He will shine on both these occasions, I feel sure; but—!’)

She did not finish her sentence, even to herself. That ‘but,’ which was in-

voluntarily wrung from her, told her emphatically that she had no hope of his shining in the character of lover and guest in the aunts' establishment.

They had so petted and made much of her since she came back to them, that an indescribable sensation of being younger and more reliant on other people than she had been for the last five years, set in. It was a debilitating feeling, and made her fear, what was the truth, namely, that her nerves were weakened by some conscious dread which assailed her when she was either just dropping off to sleep or half awaking. She could not grasp or define it. It was gone almost before she knew that it had been there. But there it had been, and it was sapping her moral and mental strength.

The preparations which the aunts made for the reception of the first male visitor who had stayed with them since they had set up house together were prettily done, in a prosperous, open-handed spirit, that showed Frances how thoroughly in earnest they were in their desire to do all due honour to their future nephew.

The best guest-chamber, which was always the sweetest, quaintest sanctuary of freshness, comfort, lavender and old china, received some indescribable touches, that made it fit for the occupation of a prince of the blood-royal.

Frances shivered as she stepped over the silver-grey grounded carpet, on which pale pink roses were grouped, to the dressing-table, which was draped with pink satin, that would have stood

alone if the table had not lent it support, and fine old lace that had covered their grandmother's court-train when she had been presented to Queen Charlotte. She shivered even more when she looked at the old Italian mirror, framed in burnished glass, which stood in the centre. She felt sure that John Treville would ruthlessly drag it into a better light to shave by, or fling his keys and loose coin down on its stand, and hate and despise it as a fragile and frivolous piece of tomfoolery, on a table intended for a man to use.

The hour of his arrival had been well timed by Frances. He was to reach Bath by a 6.30 train, and the dinner hour at Myrtle Lodge was half past seven. There would be some-

thing definite for him to do as soon as he came. He must dress, and he would be less likely to break the Venetian mirror by daylight than by lamp or candle light.

Frances drove down to the station to meet him. She was standing on the platform when the train drew up, and, as it happened, he got out of a carriage immediately opposite to her. As he stepped out, she looked past his tall figure to that of another man, who was leaning forward to say goodbye to him—a man whom, with a sudden, vivid intensifying of the morbid dread that had assailed her in half-unconscious, sleepy moments lately—she recognised as the good-looking man who had travelled down to Bath with Mr Harlby and herself, and whom

she believed till this moment to be dead.

His eyes met hers in an instant, and he drew back hastily. The train rushed on, and John Treville greeted her hurriedly, then bustled about to look after his luggage. When it was found, he had time to remark that she 'was looking very ill.' In reply to this, she asked,—

'Who was the man who said good-bye to you?' and he replied,—

'My new neighbour, at Gunwalloe Place, Mr Herbert Harlby.'

CHAPTER III.

A SINNER.

THE man who went on in the train to London, when John Treville left it at Bath, found plenty of embarrassing, not to say painful, food for reflection as he journeyed after that momentary encounter with the lady whom he rightly guessed to be Treville's future wife. Treville's future wife, and consequently his own nearest lady neighbour. Only three miles lay between Gunwalloe Place

and Wingates, and already he had fallen into the habit of friendly intimacy and frequent intercourse with John Treville. There would be no excuse to be made for dropping that intercourse when Treville married.

Already the latter had spoken freely of Miss Woodford, the lady to whom he was engaged. Already he, Herbert Harlby, the new owner of Gunwalloe Place, had said he hoped that Miss Woodford, who would be Mrs Treville by that time, would do him the honour of acting as hostess to the acquaintances and neighbours whom he intended inviting at Christmas. It was the cruellest irony of fate, that she should turn out to be the only woman in the world from whose sight and knowledge he was

desirous of concealing himself for ever.

He tortured himself by conjecturing the many ways in which she would extract from Treville all the latter knew or had heard about him—Herbert Harlby, the man who had seemed to drop from the clouds into that fair Cornish inheritance. He shrank with something worse than fear, from the thought of how she would then tell her lover all that had transpired in the course of conversation between the trio on that memorable day before she had left them at Bath. She, with that sweet, lovely face of hers, which had haunted him ever since that awful day, would probably be the means of placing him in a felon's dock or a convict's cell. Worse even, she might

be the means of attaching the suspicion of his having murdered the real—he meant the other—man, and so getting him hanged.

At one moment he made up his mind to rush back to Bath by the next train, see her, and find out what was the worst she suspected, and the worst she meant to do. The next, he shuddered at the idea of ever seeing her again, and determined to go out of the country to some obscure spot, where he might live out his harassed life unknown and unrecognised. Then again this resolution would be followed by one to wait and let Fate do her worst.

He was not a London man, he had never belonged to any of the clubs, nor during his fitful and brief sojourns

in the Metropolis had he been a constant frequenter of any of the best known cafés or restaurants. His evenings had always been spent at the theatres, when he had been in town. His days on the river in summer, and in the city in the winter on the business of a house in Liverpool, in which his father had been a junior partner and he himself a clerk at one time, before he took to roving and earning a precarious living, sometimes by acting as agent for richer men, sometimes by doing secretary's work for busy students, sometimes by teaching his own language to French pupils and French to English ones. Ah ! would that he were living that fearless open life now ! would that he had never heard of Gunwalloe Place !

Habit drew him to the theatre, the play dealt with a woman's deception, detection and despair. There was no similarity in their cases, yet every anguished throb of remorse or dread of detection and downfall that wrung her breast, caused a corresponding emotion in his. He felt it to be more than likely that he would end as she does in the story. He went away from the theatre a more madly, miserable man than he had been when he entered it.

How drearily, desperately, despairingly long the watches of that night were. Even if a few brief moments of sleep were granted him now and again, he was never oblivious of the fact that he was in great misery and direful danger. He rose early the next morning, because there was no rest for him

in the bed; then he longed to go to bed again, for there was no rest for him up. Looking in the glass, he saw that he looked ten years older than he had done on the previous day before the train ran into Bath. The only thing for which he could thank God fervently this day was, that no letters could reach him, as not being sure of where he would put up, he had not left an address behind him or given one to Treville.

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John Treville's attention was fully engrossed by Bath's handsome streets and charming outskirts, as they drove from the station to Myrtle Lodge. All he had seen of the beautiful old city previously had been from the train on his way to and from London. The

floweriness and rare trees—fulness of the suburban gardens and parks, struck him forcibly, for the part of Cornwall in which Wingates was situated was rather barren, arid, and windy, as the name of his house signified.

He did not, after that one brief glance, and the remark that she was looking very ill, study his betrothed's face again until they reached home, and Frances showered mute blessings on him for this inattention.

A terrible feeling had taken hold of her, that she had known all along that the revelation which had been made to her this day would be made. There had been a look in the eyes of the man who was called Herbert Harlby, which seemed to claim and establish a confidence and a comradeship between

them. There had been confession, appeal, entreaty and trust in that one look he had given straight into her eyes, and down, as it seemed to her, into her heart. She knew that she would never betray him, however much or however little there might be to be betrayed. She knew that the secret, of however little or great importance it might be, would shadow and environ her for life. That she would never be able to get away from its influences—never forget that it was there, and that she was the only person in the world, beside himself, who knew that it existed.

A great feeling of compassion for him and for herself welled up in her heart, and drove out all thought of and consideration for other people be-

fore it. He could be but little older than herself, she knew, yet something of the divinely protecting love of a mother for a faulty and greatly-endangered son filled her whole soul, as she realised what agony he must have endured when he saw her, and knew that John Treville would soon tell her his name and station.

‘Will he understand me as I do him? Will he fear and hate, or will he *trust* me?’ she thought over and over again as the carriage rolled along, and John Treville made short, sharp, incisive remarks about the various places as they passed—remarks which reached her ears but not her understanding,—the whole of that was absorbed in the attempt to work out the problem of what he and she

would do when they met — as they must meet, inevitably, before long.

But the drive came to an end, and with it that blessed ability to be silent which she had enjoyed while it lasted.

The aunts were at the door under the verandah, joyfully expectant of the welcome stranger who was so soon to be one of them. He received their flattering greetings complacently, but not effusively. He had met Frances Woodford, as a governess, in the family with whom he was staying in Paris, on the occasion of his taking over some agricultural implements, which he had exhibited at one of the machinery and implement expositions which were held in that city. Miss Wood-

ford's employer had bought his patents and popularised his inventions, received him into his house, shown him great hospitality, and generally impressed himself upon John Treville as a superior person of some importance.

For a time he had scarcely regarded the lovely English governess of this superior person at all. But her potent charms worked upon him at last to such an extent, that, though he disliked the idea of marrying a woman who had occupied 'a dependent position' in a friend's house, he proposed to her, and she accepted him.

At the same time, he had not forgotten, and was never likely to forget, that she was only a governess, and that no former Treville, as far

back as he could trace them, had ever married a governess before.

When he had thought about them at all, he had thought that Frances' relations, about whom she had been very reticent, were probably good, deserving, middle-class people of moderate means, who had made money sacrifices to give their niece the excellent education which had enabled her to support herself, and fill the situation in which he found her. The carriage had rather shaken him in this supposition, and now the beautifully-kept gardens and exquisitely-ordered house, to say nothing of the unmistakable air of prosperity which sat with the graceful ease of custom upon the two handsomely-dressed elderly ladies, convicted him decisively of his error.

They and their establishment astonished him. He could not understand how it was that Frances had never told him her aunts were wealthy women.

Perhaps his astonishment at sight of them scarcely equalled theirs at sight of him. They had been prepared to see a bluff, hearty, country gentleman, with a ruddy, healthy, open face, and a fine, athletic form. Instead of this they saw a tall, spare man, with a slight stoop at the shoulders, which seemed to betoken more a sedentary than an out-door life. His face had a quick, inquiring expression; and his clothes, though unmistakably of country make, were the clothes neither of an athlete nor a sportsman.

He betrayed a good deal more

anxiety and impatience about getting his luggage conveyed upstairs into his bedroom than men usually show on first arriving at the house of a stranger. He cut the aunts' salutations rather short, in fact, and told Frances that he would have a chat with her when he had unpacked, as he had the model of a patent horse-clipper with him, in which, with the aid of a bit of copper wire, he could make an improvement which had occurred to him on the way up, in the spring-action. Then, again remarking, 'How fearfully ill you're looking,' he went upstairs, and the three ladies were left free to express and hear opinions concerning him.

CHAPTER IV.

'THEY'RE NOT LOVERS.'

THE one feeling Frances Woodford had when Mr Treville hurried off to unpack his model, while his last idea for improving it was hot within him, was that of intense, poignant relief at being relieved from the presence of her lover.

He had only looked into her face twice in a casual way, yet he had seen enough to make him say that she 'looked very ill.' Had it not been that

outward attention was being given to the strange scenery through which he was passing, while his innermost thoughts were revolving round that merciful little model, he would assuredly have noticed that her illness was of the mind rather than the body, and would have questioned her concerning it in the masterful, iron-clad and intensely exasperating way which she already knew so well.

She stood resting one hand on the mantelpiece, pretending to be engaged in no more serious work than that of inhaling the odour of a yellow rose, and extracting all the sweetness that was buried in its heart. In reality, she was questioning herself as to whether, with a terrific secret in her breast, she was justified in playing on in what she

now felt to be the hollow farce of an engagement, which must end in the tragedy of marriage with John Treville.

Over and over again she told herself, as she stood there sniffing at the rose, that she was 'a fool,' worse than that, a mad, criminal fool, to suffer pangs of pity and remorse, because a man was alive and calling himself 'Herbert Harlby,' whom, she had believed, had died and been laid quietly to his rest in an Exeter churchyard many weeks ago. The pity and remorse would go on sweeping over her soul in alternate waves, and it was with a jerk, such as one experiences on a return to consciousness after a fainting fit, that she caught on to the conversation which was being carried limply on between her aunts.

In the warmth of their dear, kind hearts, they were trying to cover the disappointment they felt at the manner and appearance of their niece's lover, under an exaggerated anxiety for his comfort.

'He must be so tired after his journey, poor man. Railway travelling on such a hot day as this is most fatiguing,' Aunt Jane was saying, when Frances came back from her day dream.

'Mr Treville is never tired or hot,' Frances assured them, with a rueful laugh; 'don't disturb yourselves about him.'

'Do you think he would like a warm bath before dinner? A warm bath is so refreshing after a journey; or shall I send Price up with a

glass of sherry?' Aunt John persisted.

'He would tell Price that he never drank between meals, and send it down again. I am sure you may rely on his looking after himself, Aunt John. He dislikes a fuss being made about him.'

'That comes from his having lived alone for some time, I suppose,' the elder Miss Woodford said softly. 'When he has a dear, kind, little wife to make a fuss about him he will like it.'

'I shall never make a fuss about him; I should never do it about any man,' Frances said, dreamily.

Then she went away to dress for dinner, and there was silence in the room for a few moments.

It was broken by Aunt Jane.

'They are not like lovers,' she said.

'They are not in love,' Aunt John replied, rather sadly. 'But if she esteems him, perhaps it will be as well.'

'So pretty as she is, too, so graceful and fascinating, and so good. One would have thought a man would feel that he could never make enough of her.'

The widowed sister smiled and sighed.

'Very few men are oppressed with the difficulty of doing that in real life, my dear,' she said, with the oracular air of one who knew.

'Can it be his position and place that made her accept him?' conjectured

Jane; 'or do you think she has had a disappointment?'

'I think she has never cared for anyone, and let us pray now that she never may,' Aunt John murmured fervently. All their elation at the prospect of entertaining the future man of the family had vanished.

Meantime, John Treville had unpacked his model, put the Venetian mirror face upwards, in a slanting position on the pillows, from whence it was likely to slide if there was the slightest vibration in the room, and covered the pink satin and old lace-draped table with bits of steel, copper wire and innumerable tools.

He took off his coat, and set to work so earnestly, that, when the dinner-bell rang, he had not com-

menced his dressing operations; consequently, the dinner had to be put back, thus upsetting the cook's arrangements for the evening. Such a thing had never happened at Myrtle Lodge before, during the whole term of her nine years' residence with Mrs Gray and Miss Woodford. The enormity of the innovation upset her nerves to such an extent, that the soup and several other things were either burnt or half cold. And John Treville did not omit to candidly mention that they were so, and to express an opinion to the effect that 'a cook who spoilt good food was as bad as the dry-rot in a house.'

To do him justice, when he had made his protest against the wrong done to domestic economy by the

spoiling of good food, he showed that it was not merely fastidiousness, but a genuine rigid regard for right-doing, even in small matters, which had dictated his remark.

He ate heartily, and was rather disposed to censure Frances for not doing the same, prophesying at the same time, that when he 'got her down in Cornwall, the air there would soon give her an appetite for healthy food, such as pasties, leeky-pie and the like.'

'Have you brought us a photograph of Wingates? I begged Frances to write and ask you for one,' Aunt John said cheerfully, when they were left with the fruit and wine, which was neither burnt nor half cold.

'I did write and ask you; did I not, John?'

'You did, and as it happened, Harlby was with me when your letter came. He said he would take a photograph of it, and make a sketch of the old place as well, and I have both in my portmanteau upstairs. Capital photographer is Harlby, good draughtsman, too. He has drawn out the details of some of my implement inventions very cleverly.'

'And who is Mr Harlby?' Aunt John asked.

'Man who has just come into a very nice property down next door to me; surely you must have seen something about him in the papers a short time ago? He was travelling down to take possession of the property, and a poor fellow (no one knows who he was) died in the same carriage. There

was an inquest, of course. It might have been awkward for Harlby, but he came out of it splendidly. He paid all the funeral expenses' (added Mr Treville thoughtfully); 'shows *what* a good fellow he must be to do that for a perfect stranger, who was inconsiderate enough to die in a railway carriage in which Harlby and he were travelling alone.'

'Oh! *now* I remember!' Aunt John said, with the satisfied air of one who already knows some of the details of a popular gruesome story. 'Frances travelled with them from Paddington. How extremely odd and interesting.'

'*Frances* travelled with them,' Mr Treville questioned with severity. 'Why, Harlby has always stated that he travelled alone with the poor fel-

low who died, from Paddington to Exeter.'

'Probably Mr Harlby either didn't notice me, or forgot me,' Frances said, with lips that seemed to herself to crumble and writhe. In reality they did not even quiver.

'He couldn't have forgotten you, even if you were insignificant in appearance; and you're certainly not that.'

Mr Treville leant back in his chair, and fixed his eyes steadily on Frances.

'Can't make it out at all,' he went on, not addressing anyone in particular, but apparently annoyed that no one volunteered a solution of the mystery.

'Perhaps he wished to spare a lady the pain of giving evidence on such a distressing circumstance,' Aunt John

suggested, harking back to her original opinion.

‘Nonsense!’ said Mr Treville sharply, ‘if I had been travelling with Frances on such an occasion, I shouldn’t have told a lie to spare her feelings. Why should he do it? A stranger to her.’

No one answered him.

‘I shall speak to Harlby about it when I see him,’ he went on, looking round the table defiantly.

‘You might spare my feelings to the extent of letting a matter alone that does not concern you,’ Frances said quietly.

‘I tell you it does concern me, my dear, that a man with whom I am on friendly and neighbourly terms should have told a lie on a very serious sub-

ject. Did the poor fellow who died so soon after you left the carriage look ill?’

‘I have no recollection of him,’ she said coldly.

‘Did you recognise Harlby when you saw him at the station to-day?’

She hesitated for a moment, and then said firmly,—

‘No! I *did not* recognise Mr Harlby.’

‘Your memory must be very badly cultivated,’ he said reprovingly. ‘I have always made it a point, from my boyhood, to recall at the end of every day every incident that has occurred during the day before I sleep. I’ll get you into the same habit, you’ll find it such a useful one.’

‘I am sorry to leave you alone, Mr

Treville,' Aunt John said gently, rising as she spoke; 'we would have asked some other gentleman to meet you, but we thought you would rather we made it *quite* a family party the first night, as you have not seen Frances for some months.'

'Thanks — exactly so,' he replied, following them out of the room. 'No, I won't have any more wine, thank you. I must have another go at my model for an hour or two, as I mean to take it up to town and patent the improvement to-morrow.'

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If Mr Herbert Harlby had only heard this conversation, he would not have writhed in anguish on account of Frances Woodford. But perhaps he would have suffered almost as much

in anticipation of John Treville's uncalled-for interference.

But before the burden of this new terror was laid upon him, he received another unexpected and far more dangerous shock

CHAPTER V.

MRS HARLBY, WIDOW.

LYING at the bottom of the Gladstone, on which was painted the name of 'Herbert Harlby,' there was the photograph of a young and pretty girl. There was no signature to it, nor was there the name of any photographer on the mount. Apparently it had been taken by an amateur, for instead of being stippled up out of all resemblance to the original it was untouched, and one or two blemishes in the lovely face were left distinctly visible.

When the new owner of Gunwalloe Place had unpacked the Gladstone, his first impulse had been to frame the lovely face and put it on the oak mantelpiece of the library in which he generally sat. But a second thought decided him to lock it up. It is awkward to be unable to give a name to the original of a striking photograph to which you have given a prominent position in your favourite sanctum.

About the same time that the master of Gunwalloe Place encountered Frances Woodford for the second time, and endured untold agonies on account of that encounter, a beautiful young woman, accompanied by a nurse, a baby, a maid, and a van-load of luggage, arrived at The Langham Hotel, took a suite of rooms, and gave

the name Mrs Harlby, Gunwalloe Place, Cornwall, to be entered in the hotel books.

She was young, very vivacious, very lovely, and very heartily devoted to the baby boy. The daughter of an English officer, she had lived nearly all her grown-up life in India, until two years before her appearance on the stage of this story. Her father had then taken her to New York, where business relations were established between himself and a fine, fair, florid Englishman, called Herbert Harlby. Shortly after this Colonel Sheldon died, and his only child, Rose, married the fine, fair, florid Englishman, because she was homeless, and he was kind enough to offer her one.

There had not been a particle of

romance in the affair. He was an emotional, boastful, intensely egotistical, excitable man, who would do very liberal and generous deeds when the doing them conduced either to his own glorification or pleasure. In marrying lovely, penniless Rose Sheldon, he gratified himself hugely. He gained great credit from everyone to whom he told the story,—and he told it to everyone he met,—for his munificence in endowing his deceased partner's pauper child with himself and all his worldly goods. And, at the same time, he became the legal possessor—untrammelled by any scruples as to his own fidelity—of the prettiest, brightest girl to whom he had ever had the opportunity of making love.

He wearied of her beauty and

brightness as quickly as he had done of the charms of every other woman whom, he had fancied, wooed and won in his life. But as the marriage tie did not fetter him in the slightest degree, he continued to treat her kindly in a casual sort of way, and gave her absolute freedom of action and plenty of money to do as she pleased with.

How long this state of affairs would have continued without an explosion need not be considered now. Business called him to England, and the state of her health rendered it desirable that she should remain in New York. He did not think it necessary to tell her what the business was, and she had not the faintest desire to know. He had a variety of lady friends in New York, with whom it was important (he

thought) to make elaborate arrangements for future and frequent correspondence, so his time was too much taken up for him to have any opportunity of taking Rose into his confidence. They parted with cordiality and composure—that he did not exhibit this latter quality in his partings with several of the aforesaid lady friends is beside the point—and she never saw him again.

But she heard from him once. He wrote in scrawling spasmodic haste to tell her that his claim, as the only living representative of the ancient Cornish family of Harlbys, was established, and that he was on the point of starting that very day to see the house and property which was called Gunwalloe Place. He added, that when things

were a little settled, he would send or come for her; that he had lodged a large sum for her in a New York Bank; and wound up by expressing a hope that he should find some pretty women among his new county neighbours.

He posted his letter, started on his journey, and died suddenly in the railway-carriage near Exeter. But she was ignorant of this when, in a fit of caprice, she came to England and quartered herself and child at the Langham Hotel.

From there she wrote to her husband, having first found out to which port-town in Cornwall Gunwalloe Place was nearest. Then, without any impatience for an answer marring her intense enjoyments of the novel sights which

met her eyes at every turn, she shopped, drove, rode, dined, went to theatres and concerts, with the zest which a tyro in London blessed with the holiday - nature only can experience.

Her letter, with others, was forwarded to Herbert Harlby, Esq., the Junior Conservative Club, Piccadilly. It ran as follows :—

‘ DEAR HERBERT,—Baby was born just a fortnight after you left me in New York. He is such a dear little fellow, rather red, but quite pretty, with big blue eyes, and a little fluff of yellow hair. He knows me already. Shall I wait here till you come and fetch me? I have brought Sanders with me, and of course a nurse for

baby. I have called him after you and papa.—Your affectionate Wife,

‘ROSE HARLBY.’

The man who received this letter read it, and was filled with deeper pity for the one who had penned it than he had previously felt for himself. Poor woman! She was evidently the wife of the other Herbert Harlby—the wife of the man who had died so suddenly in the railway carriage. She was the mother of that man’s child, probably she loved that man dearly, and would fight for his child’s rights, or claims, rather. He substituted the word ‘claims’ for ‘rights’ with a mental apology to himself for his verbal inaccuracy. There was no one of course with any rights regarding Gunwalloe

Place save himself, Herbert Harlby, the last of the race.

It would be a suicidal policy to avoid the widow who bore the same name as himself. He would see her with as little delay as possible, and inform her as fully as was expedient of the circumstances attending her late husband's death. He hoped she would not give way to an uncontrollable burst of grief, when he told her that not only was her husband dead, but that he had deceived her while living, with respect to being the heir to the Gunnwalloe property. Poor thing, it would wring his own heart to face her with these painful facts; but if he did not do it speedily, he would probably have to face something even more personally unpleasant before long.

He was making his way slowly with reluctant feet from the Metropole, where he was staying, towards the Langham Hotel, where the wife and child were awaiting the husband and father. In Regent Street, to his intense chagrin, he met, and could not avoid, John Treville. In all his previous life he had never shrank from or feared a meeting with man or woman. It was only since he had been the lucky, envied owner of Gunwalloe Place that he had experienced the sensation of nervous agitation at the sight of a fellow-creature.

'You're the very fellow I wanted to see,' Treville began, emphatically. 'I am very much surprised at hearing from Miss Woodford, the lady I am engaged to, that she travelled

down from Paddington to Bath in the same carriage with you and the poor fellow who died at Exeter. You said at the inquest that you had travelled alone with him the whole way?’

‘I was thrown out of gear altogether at the time, by the shock. I forget what I said at the inquest,’ Harlby said, impatiently.

‘But, my good fellow, you could not have forgotten at the inquest that you had a lady fellow-passenger more than half the way?’

‘I suppose at the time I had a vague idea of sparing the lady the annoyance of having her name mixed up in such a painful matter.’

‘Now I shouldn’t have acted in that way,’ John Treville persisted;

'much better to have let the lady bear her share of the temporary annoyance, than lay yourself open to suspicion by concealing the fact of her having been there.'

'Does the lady blame me for my consideration for her feelings?' Harlby asked, reddening.

'Not at all. She seems to dislike the subject, and I can't get a word from her about it, without positively dragging it out. She wouldn't have told me she was in the same carriage with you, only her old aunts let the cat out of the bag. By the way, I am staying with the old ladies at Bath, only just ran up to London to-day, about some of my inventions. I wish you could come with me and look at a direct infringement of one

of my patents. I am going to run a big firm for selling it, and shall most likely get heavy damages.'

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure.'

Harlby managed to say this quite heartily. His spirits had risen since finding that the woman, whose sweet face had haunted him, ever since that fateful day on which he had seen her first, had not betrayed him.

'Well, come along then, I'm bound for Longacre.' John Treville marched briskly onward, and Harlby had to follow him hastily to explain.

'I should be delighted, but I have a pressing engagement, and, as it is, I am rather late for it. When do you go down? Can you dine with me to-night at the Metropole?'

'I go back to Bath by the four train. When are you bound for Gunwalloe?'

'To-morrow, I hope. I'm sick of town. I suppose your movements are uncertain?'

'No; I have arranged to go back next week, and I shall take the old aunts and Miss Woodford with me. We all think that it's better she should see the place, and look round the furniture before she goes there for good. It hadn't occurred to me that Wingates would need redecorating and refurbishing when I set up a wife, but the lady seems to hold a different opinion. She doesn't like the name "Wingates." I shouldn't wonder if she tries to persuade me to do some planting at the east end of the house to

keep off the east wind. We feel them a good deal. My poor mother wasted a lot of time in trying to persuade my father to protect that end of the house with trees and high shrubs. But he was not going to shut out the view for the sake of keeping off the wind. Neither am I.'

Mr Harlby meditated over this conversation after they parted. To please her, to give that sweet, serious-faced woman, who had bewitched him, one hour's gratification, he would have cut down every tree on Gunwalloe, or undertaken to make forests and pleasure-grounds flourish in the wilderness! God bless her! for her noble reserve and disinclination to chatter and gossip about the events of that awful day on which his fellow-passenger had died.

God bless her for that one look of heart-aching sympathy which she had given him a day or two ago at Bath!

All fear and distrust of her had vanished. He found himself longing to look upon her again. Longing to hold her hand for an instant in his ; to meet the steady glance of those grave, earnest eyes, that held such a rich promise of loyalty, tenderness, and stability in their beautiful depths. He longed to get her unspoken pledge to be his friend, to honour him with her interest and sympathy, and to give him the incentive to lead a useful, honourable, clean, and straightforward life in order to retain it. He longed—!

His thoughts were wrenched away from her suddenly as he found himself in the hall at the Langham, and re-

membered that he had come to see a Mrs Harlby, and that his appearance and name would probably give her an awful shock.

Mrs Harlby was disengaged, and quite ready to receive the gentleman, who had sent no name up, merely stating that he had come from Gunwalloe Place on business.

CHAPTER VI.

MATERNAL SOLICITUDE.

As Mr Harlby stepped into a private sitting-room, the bright, young beauty, which he instantly recognised as the original of the photograph found at the bottom of the Gladstone, came forward to meet him.

She was dressed charmingly in a light, greyish-blue summer cloth costume, and she looked the embodiment of happy, careless, graceful youth. Could

she have loved the coarse, lonely, florid, boastful man who was dead?

'You are an ambassador from my husband? I felt that he would depute the troublesome task of coming to fetch baby and me to some one else.'

She spoke with the utmost indifference of her anticipation of her husband's neglect, and this gave Mr Harlby a sense of relief. He would not have to control the expression of profound and overwhelming woe when circumstances led up to the announcement of that husband's death.

'On the contrary,' he said, very gently and respectfully, 'I have called on you in consequence of having received this' (he handed her her own letter, which she had addressed to Herbert Harlby, Esq., Gunwalloe Place,

Cornwall). ‘I am Herbert Harlby, of Gunwalloe Place, Cornwall. Your letter has—has staggered me.’

This was true—it *had* staggered him pitifully.

Without speaking, she turned and rang the bell, in answer to which a well-appointed, responsible-looking maid appeared.

‘Get Mr Harlby’s photograph, Sanders; it’s somewhere in baby’s room, and his last letter, the one in which he tells me he was on the point of starting for Gunwalloe Place,’ she said; and when Sanders vanished on her mission, the young lady resumed with extraordinary calmness,—‘I am not astonished at there being some confusion about this matter. There always *is* confusion where my husband is con-

cerned. Will you not sit down, Mr Harlby?’

She beat her fingers sharply and impatiently on the table, and remained in deep thought for a few moments. Then she roused herself and said, smiling very sweetly, and with an evident desire to relieve the embarrassment of her wretched guest,—

‘ You will see, when Sanders brings his photograph and last letter to me, what an inconsequently sanguine man my husband is. Still! I can’t understand his having deceived himself in such an extraordinary way about a business matter, such an important business matter, too, as the succession to a valuable property. Oh! here is Sanders; this is my husband, and now you shall read the letter.’

She paused abruptly, for Mr Harlby had dropped the photograph as if it had burnt him.

'Pardon,' he said agitatedly. 'I recognise this as the likeness of a man whom I saw once only, but then under circumstances that imprinted his likeness on my memory indelibly.'

'Yes; tell me more.'

She had risen, and now stood, young, slender, and strong, her unconquerably bright spirit shining out through all her anxiety.

'Let me speak; let me explain matters first to your companion here,' he said, indicating Sanders, with a movement of his hand.

'No! no! no! Sanders shall stay and hear everything, but *so will I.*'

'Have you happened to see in any

papers an account of a dramatic, a tragic, circumstance that occurred in a railway carriage on the Great Western line on the day on which this letter is dated?’

‘I have not. Go on quickly. Say what this dramatically-tragic circumstance was. It concerned my husband, I am sure.’

‘Oh, that day the original of this photograph and I were travelling together in the same carriage. A lady, who had come with us from Paddington, got out at Bath. I must soon have fallen asleep after she left the carriage. When I awoke we were at Exeter, and I thought my fellow-traveller had fainted.’

He paused, and pressed a handkerchief to his brow and lips. The young

lady was looking at him so pityingly that he wished he had been the man to die that day instead of the other.

‘Instead of his having fainted, what —what was it, sir?’ Sanders faltered.

‘He was dead!’ said the owner of Gunwalloe Place.

‘Dead!’

‘Madam, every effort was made by the medical men, who were on the spot within five minutes, to revive him. Those efforts were all in vain. So were all the efforts we made to discover his name and friends. His initials were the same as mine, “H. H.” His cigar case, and a few other trifles, are in the possession of the Exeter police.’

‘My dear little boy has no father, so

I must do the more for him myself. It was all a mistake, then, on Mr Harlby's part that he was the heir to a great property? Oh, I wish that had been true. My baby would have been a great English gentleman if it had been, instead of being only my baby, as he is now. But you can't help it, Mr Harlby; don't look so distressed, pray don't. It is unjust and unreasonable of me to bemoan my baby not having what he never had a right to. Fool that I was, to rely for a moment on any statement made by—'

She checked herself in some confusion, at having allowed her naturally candid and veracious spirit to run away with her to the extent of expressing her genuine opinion of her late husband to a perfect stranger.

But the stranger was not thinking her imprudent. He was trying to solve a torturing problem which he had put before himself, and this was : How could he best, without alarming that quick, proud, sensitive nature, serve herself and her child for the rest of his life ?

' You are so kind, and so sorry for my disappointment about my baby not being the heir to a fine English property, that you are exaggerating my troubles in your own mind, Mr Harlby,' she said, softly and earnestly. ' After all, I have very little to grumble at. I should have been happier if my husband had died in a less tragic way, and if I could have helped to make his last hours happier. But the tragedy of it is felt by me only, not

by him. And I have the boy, and, I believe, plenty of money to spend on him; and you—you will be my friend, won't you ?'

'God helping me, *I will*,' he said so fervently, that, touched by his emotion, she again reverted to what would have been their parts in the natural order of things, and essayed to comfort him.

'I am so *sorry* for what you must have felt just now, when you recognised my husband's photo, and realised that you had to tell me you saw him die.'

'Is there anything I can do for you—anyone I can find and bring to you?' he asked eagerly.

She shook her head.

'No. Baby and I are quite alone

in England, as far as relations or friends go. I have some acquaintances in New York—but I never wish to see any of them again,’ she added hastily, thinking of the numerous syrens, whose strains of false sentiment had found echoes in her husband’s falsely susceptible heart.

‘ Will you let me be of use to you and your child?’ he pleaded.

‘ Yes, I will. When I have had time to think, you shall write for me to my husband’s business - people in New York, and make them tell me exactly how I stand. My husband was a rich man; he need never have let himself be deluded by a similarity of name into coveting your property, and pretending to think it was his. By-and-by you shall take me to the

place where he is buried, and then, when my boy is old enough, he will see that his mother did all the honour she could to his father's memory.'

He felt that he could not stand the strain of further intercourse with this guileless, generous, unsuspicuous nature any longer. What a worthless hound the man must have been to have been careless of her, as he evidently had been.

'May I call again to-morrow? you may have some commands for me?' he asked, rising up.

She shook her head.

'No, not to-morrow. I know what England is,' she said, smiling rather sadly; 'and now, more than ever, I must never do anything that baby

wouldn't like to hear I had done, when he is older. All the people in the hotel will know that I have heard to-day, for the first time, that I am a widow. I must behave well, as my father would have had me behave if he had been alive. My father is the standard I have always set up for my rule of right and wrong, Mr Harlby,' she said wistfully, and then, with a sudden little spasm of happy pride, she added,—'I wish *you* could have known my father. You would have liked him so much, he was such a splendid man and soldier, and *such* an honourable gentleman. If God is good enough to let my boy grow up, and grow up like my father, what a happy woman I shall be. Sha'n't I, Sanders?'

The childish appeal to her servant for support of, and sympathy with, her sentiments, struck Mr Harlby as being one of the prettiest bits of pathos he had ever witnessed. It made him wish, with more remorsefully-passionate force than ever, that he had not happened to be a fellow-traveller with the other Herbert Harlby when the latter reached the bourne from whence no traveller returneth.

'If I had only known that day that he had a wife and son,' he kept on saying to himself as he wandered about town, making all manner of business for himself, in the desperate desire to get rid of the most depressing companions he had ever been afflicted with, his own thoughts. 'Heaven help and forgive me; I

should have been a different man this day if I had only known he had a wife and son. Is it too late to undo—to retrace the erring steps—to—what an ass I am! The law would be on my side, I'm confident, if—I hadn't made that one false step.'

.

'Poor fellow! poor fellow! Sanders, I shall go to him at once and nurse him if he wants nursing—'

'Miss Rose, are you off your head?'
Sanders asked this quite shakily.
Mrs Harlby's words and manner were inexplicable. The usually sweet, bright, vivacious young widow, whose whole soul, up to this morning, had seemed to be wrapped up in her baby, was standing now before Sanders, tears streaming plenteously and unbecomingly

from her pretty eyes, while she pointed a shaky finger at a paragraph headed :—

‘ Shocking Accident to a Cornish Gentleman ! ’

‘ I can’t read it, Miss Rose, without my glasses, too ; they’re left in the nursery because you shrieked that wildly, that I thought the place was on fire, or that you had blown your face to pieces with them horrid methylated spirits you curl your hair with. As *will* happen one day, I’m sure, if you won’t be warned in time, and drop them for Hinde’s curlers, which *can’t* explod— ’

‘ Oh ! never mind my hair exploding, dear old Sanders, this is *awful* ! Mr Harlby, of Gunwalloe Place, was out shooting with a large party of gentlemen at Wingates yesterday, and was accidentally shot in the face by one of the

number. Mr Harlby is now lying in a precarious condition at Wingates, the seat of his friend, Mr Tre-ville.'

'I've always said snares was far safer than guns!' Sanders observed sententiously. 'Poor gentleman! he had a pleasant face, too. 'Tis a pity that he wasn't shot in the leg, or the arm, or somewhere, where it wouldn't show so much.'

'Sanders, I shall go down and nurse him! You see it says his condition is precarious! *What* a friend he has been to me! How he has looked after baby's interests. You and baby and nurse and I will all go down to Win-gates to-day, and see if we can be of any use to him.'

'And it's my belief, if we do that, his

friend Mr Treville will send us straight off to the County Asylum as a lot of wandering lunatics,' Sanders said, pressing her lips together, till the thin red line they made expressed disapprobation more emphatically than any words could have done.

'I shall go and nurse him! he won't think me a lunatic. It's what my father would have done for any man, woman, or beast who had ever been kind to him. We'll pack up and be off at once.'

'Miss Rose—Mrs Harlby, I mean—' Sanders began imploringly, 'you can't go trapezing into a stranger's house, baby, and baggage, and all, after a strange gentleman, who's nothing to you,' Sanders expostulated, wringing her hands and almost weeping.

In a moment Rose's arms were round the old servant's neck.

'He is something to me; he has been a friend to me, and has taken care of baby's interests much, *much* better than I could have done. How kind he was when he came and told me of my disappointment about Gunwalloe Place for baby, and it wasn't his fault that I was disappointed. There were tears in his eyes, tears of pity for me, a stranger, and my little child. I should be an ungrateful wretch if I didn't go to him, now that he is ill and in danger. I should think any woman a beast who won't come to my boy, by - and - by, if he's sick and *I* am not with him. Mr Harlby has neither mother nor sister—he told me so—I'll go and be both to him.'

'Lord bless your innocent heart!' Sanders thought, as she went away to pack. ('Mothers and sisters for gentlemen like Mr Harlby aren't made of such as you!')

CHAPTER VII.

‘ DUCHESS ’ AND ‘ FAIRY QUEEN.’

IT was the biggest shoot John Treville had ever had at Wingates. He had bred and preserved pheasants enough to make themselves heard of very creditably in the neighbourhood, and he wished to show Frances and her aunts, who were staying there, that he could get good men to shoot them too.

He had invariably spoken of Wingates in a singularly unpretentious way,

saying it was ‘comfortable, roomy, put together in the good old way, before jerry-building came into vogue,’ and he had added, that the ‘furniture was not made of the modern imitation-of-every-known period stuff, but substantial, plain, useful articles, that had been in daily use in his great-grandfather’s time, and had never wanted the aid of glue-pot or nail to keep it together since it had first been made.’

It had been a pleasant surprise to the aunts, after hearing Wingates spoken of in this way, and seeing a photograph of it, taken from the worst point of view, badly focussed and improperly developed, to find it a fine imposing, granite mansion, the larger portion of it dating from James the Second’s reign; and the latest additions

of it having been made in the palmiest days (architecturally speaking) of good Queen Anne. It was a handsome house, standing well up on a high level in the midst of handsome, well-kept gardens, surrounded by walls fifteen, and in some places twenty, feet high.

The aunts had experienced sensations of surprise and delight at sight of the place, which was so far superior to anything they had indulged themselves in expecting to see; but Frances had felt neither of these emotions. She was not 'surprised,' because she had grasped the fact, that Mr Treville always rather understated and underrated things belonging to himself, with the exception of his inventions. She was not 'delighted' because — but we

shall gather better from an observation of her own manner, and an attention to her own words, than from anything that can be said or conjectured by a third person, why she was not 'delighted' with anything she saw at Wingates.

It had been an easy thing, comparatively, to tell herself in the first flush of her reactionary feeling against her projected marriage, that she would 'free John Treville and herself by breaking off the engagement.' In theory the thing was practicable enough, but the knowledge that she had no reason which she dared assign for her change of intention checked her.

Moreover, when John Treville came back from town, and after telling her of his chance encounter with Mr

Harlby, forbore to make any unpleasant inquiries, or to condemn either Harlby or herself for not having proclaimed from the house-tops that she had been in the carriage from Paddington to Bath with the unfortunate man who had died just after she left it, she felt warmly grateful. She attributed to consideration for herself what was in reality only his intense concentration of interest in some of his latest inventions. If there had not been a screw loose in the spring action of an implement that was a mongrel among implements, being a combination of harrow, plough and tormentor, he would thoroughly have investigated the case, though he had nothing whatever to do with it. As it was, he resolved to let it lie fallow for a time, but he had no in-

tention of letting that bit of the dead past bury its dead. On the contrary, he fully intended to resuscitate the unpleasant corpse by - and - by, when Frances would be his wife, and, of course, amenable to his discipline, and ready to confide everything to him. Meantime, he got up a shooting-party, and invited Mr Harlby to it, and to dinner at Wingates afterwards.

A little boy, the son of Mr Treville's gamekeeper, was one of the beaters that day. A good-looking, sharp, bright little fellow of twelve, whose hereditary taste for and love of sport was only equalled by his appetite for chestnuts, thousands of which were ripening rapidly in John Treville's woods. He was just beginning to swarm up the trunk of a tree close by to where

Mr Harlby was stationed, when the latter saw a gun carried by a proverbially short-sighted man pointed at the lad, evidently under the mistaken impression that he was a pheasant. In a flash Mr Harlby remembered that the boy was the only child of his parents, and in the same moment he sprang between the boy and the purblind man who was taking aim at him, with the result that he (Harlby) received the contents of the gun full in his face, and the little boy was saved.

They carried him back to Wingates on a gate, not knowing whether it was a living man or a corpse that they were carrying, for he was steeped in a death-like unconsciousness, from which he did not emerge for many a weary hour.

And while he was lying there mutilated, and to all appearances dead, Frances Woodford realised that she belonged to him whether he lived or died—whether he ever would or would not claim her, whether he loved her, or was indifferent to her, or hated her! She belonged to him, and she would never be John Treville's wife.

It came about quite naturally that she and Mrs Gray should constitute themselves his nurses. Mr Treville himself seemed to expect that she should act precisely as if she were already mistress of Wingates and the wounded man's hostess. Aunt John, scenting the truth, and tremblingly contemplating pitiless consequences, was still soft-hearted enough to aid and abet the unauthorised cause, and facilitate the development

of a fondness which she felt to be foolish, but had not the heart to kill.

As far as the fulfilment of John Treville's reasonable hopes and expectations were concerned, nothing could have been more inauspicious than this accident, which had happened to his friend and neighbour Harlby. Courage and unselfishness are qualities which invariably appeal to a woman, more especially if they are exhibited by a man in whom she has no right to take a strong interest. Mr Harlby had exhibited these qualities to a marked degree. He had deliberately risked his own life to save that of a child of whom he knew nothing, excepting that he was the only son of his parents. He had not lost his life by the action, but he had probably lost the good looks

which had formerly distinguished him, and been his passport to the favour of every woman who had met him; and he had certainly lost the sight of one eye. Frances Woodford had wrestled with the regard which she could not help feeling for him before these things happened. But now she felt that he was the one man for whom she could either live or die.

The little boy whose life had probably been saved by the action, which was injurious to the best interest of so many worthy people, rivalled Frances in devotion to the injured man. He was a good-looking, well-grown, healthy-minded boy, whose boards-school life had not injured him; its influences having been counteracted by a conservative father, who

had a good deal of the real feudal feeling hanging about him. As far back as either employer or employed could trace, the Tregoses had been gamekeepers to the Trevilles. To follow his father and succeed to the post had hitherto been Tommy Tre-goose's highest ambition. But from the moment Mr Harlby stopped the shot that would otherwise have ended Tommy's earthly career, the ambition that was the offspring of heredity died, and a new one, the earnest desire to in some way serve Mr Harlby, reigned in its stead.

October was in its infancy when the accident happened, and the month was on its last legs before Mr Harlby came back from the debateable land in which people who,

are neither quite dead nor quite alive, wander.

While he had been wandering there, other figures had been sketched in on the canvas, whereon some of the passing follies and faultinesses of the people with whom this story deals, were portrayed.

Mr Harlby was still unconscious of the hopes and fears, the loves and hates and indifferences of those around him, when very unexpected visitors arrived at the great massive granite house, one of whom clamoured so prettily for admission, that John Treville's barrier of strong sense broke down. He let the intruders in, and directly he had done so he, for the first time in his life, felt that he had done a weak thing.

From the average observer's point of view, the intruders were not very alarming people. A young, charmingly pretty woman in widow's weeds, and a severely respectable attendant, who might be either a housekeeper or a lady's maid. They were both very tired, for they had come by train from London to Fowey, and from Fowey by a hired carriage that day. And the leading spirit of the little party was a trifle incoherent, on account of her great anxiety.

She claimed and gained admission on the ground of Mr Harlby being the best friend she and her baby (whom she incidentally mentioned here she had 'left with his nurse at Fowey,') had ever had or ever could have. In the hurry and confusion,

the turmoil and excitement, John Treville forgot to ask her name, and she forgot to mention it, until she was standing over a blazing log-fire in the comfortable, well-lighted hall. Then, as she shed some of her travelling wraps, and warmed her daintily-shod delicately slim feet and ankles, she shattered John Treville to his foundation by saying,—

‘I am Mrs Herbert Harlby. Of course, he has told you about me, and about all his goodness to me and to baby? Will he know me, do you think? Will he—’

‘Are you his wife?’

Her starry eyes opened wider, but did not drop for a moment.

‘Not his wife, only the widow of the other Herbert Harlby, of the

one who died in the railway carriage, you know !'

'The widow of—the other—the man who died. Was *he* Herbert Harlby too ?'

'Yes, yes,' she said impatiently. 'You know he married me in New York. I *really am* his wife, I mean his widow. You are doubtful of me; but I was *really* married to him,' she drew herself up proudly as she added, 'or I shouldn't be here with a baby.'

'I am not doubtful of you,' John Treville said, more gently than he had ever spoken to a strange young woman before in his life. Then he added, in a very low key, 'God knows, I'm not doubtful of you !'

As they stood there, one on either side of the great hearth, where huge dogs supported the blazing logs, with the old expectant servant Sanders standing a little apart from them, Frances ran down the stairs and was in their midst before she knew anyone was there.

'I want Aunt Jane to come up—'

She was beginning, when her dazzled eyes grew accustomed to the light, and she saw that Mr Treville had strangers with him.

'I beg your pardon, John,' she added hastily. 'Coming from a darkened room, I did not see for the moment that you were not alone.'

'This lady is Mrs Herbert Harlby,' John Treville said bluntly. 'She

has come down, as I understand, to take the task of nursing our unfortunate friend into her own hands.'

No woman could mistake for an instant the true source of the horror and grief-stricken accents in which Frances repeated the name.

'Mrs Herbert Harlby!'

But they fell unrevealingly and un-instructively on John Treville's ears.

'I am not his wife,' the beautiful young stranger said quickly, and cordially, though a flatness, for which she was at a loss to account, had fallen over her own spirit. She took it for granted at once that the graceful, rather sad-faced, sweetly pretty woman, who addressed Mr Treville as 'John' was his sister. She took

it equally for granted that the sad-faced, sweetly pretty woman was nursing Mr Harlby, and that she took rather more than a nurse-like interest in her patient.

It was only ‘pure womanly’ that these two, Frances Woodford and Rose Harlby, brought together by stress of circumstances, in a common cause which involved the warmest and deepest feelings each was capable of entertaining should be antipathetic to one another from the first.

If pure reason had reigned in both their minds, each ought to have been delighted that the injured man had created such an intense interest in the other breasts. But, somehow or other, neither of them felt this delight. At the same time each admitted to

herself fully and generously the great claims her rival had to any man's regard.

' Sanders,' said Mrs Harlby, directly she found herself alone with her old servant in one of the many guest-chambers which John Trevill's house-keeper prided herself on always having ready,—' Sanders, that young lady who came down from Mr Harlby's room is just what a great English gentleman's wife ought to be. She looks like a young duchess! I've never seen a duchess, but she looks like what I think duchesses ought to look like.'

' And you look like a well-grown fairy queen; there's none of your duchesses, nor anyone else, can come near you, Miss Rose, when you look

happy.' ('And you don't look that to-night'), the old servant added mentally.

About the same time Frances, standing with extreme reluctance in the hall, while her thoughts, heart, and attention had all wandered back to Herbert Harlby's bedside, was saying,—

'What an exquisitely dainty bit of porcelain she looks. What has brought her here, John?'

'Saw an account of the accident, and being plunged up to the hilt in gratitude already, she has now steeped herself deeper still in pity. You know what pity is akin to?' he added, with a grim smile.

'Love, of course!' she answered tersely.

'Exactly so! Love, of course, on

her side only, perhaps, so far; but if he recovers, the best thing for all parties is, that it should be on his side too, and that they should marry, and so make an end of a story that isn't very clear reading at present. I think you had better leave this nursing business to the others now, Frances. You haven't picked up a bit in either plumpness or colour since you came down, and this air ought to put flesh on to any woman's bones, and paint in roses on any woman's cheeks.'

'I am afraid I shall never please you by getting fat or red,' she said, moving away to the drawing-room. Then she paused a moment, to add wearily,—'I came down to look for Aunt Jane. I wanted her to relieve Aunt John. Yes, I will leave the

nursing to the others. There is no fear of his being neglected, now Mrs Harlby has come.'

'Not the least fear,' he responded heartily. 'Poor fellow! such a handsome chap as he was, too! Pollard says he will be fearfully scarred.'

'And every scar will remind those who look at him of his unselfishness and bravery,' Frances said aloud, and to herself she whispered, — 'And disfigurement will make him dearer to me than he was before. Heaven help me! What ought I to do now? Die, and leave him to *her*!'

CHAPTER VIII.

A CREATURE OF IMPULSE.

WHILE Mr Harlby was lying senseless and shattered at Wingates, a lady, who had often seen him in the days of his health and handsomeness, but who had never gained to intimacy or even speech with him, developed one of those dark determinations, to make up for lost time as soon as he should be well again, which do occasionally agitate the female breast.

This lady was Mrs Pollard, the

wife of the leading medical man in the neighbourhood of Gunwalloe Place and Wingates. ‘A woman of parts,’ old-world novelists would probably have termed her, and so she was. A woman of various parts, indeed; some of which were merely highly unpleasant, others deadly dangerous.

She had been a handsome woman long years ago, and now, though she owned to having been a citizen of this world for over half-a-century, she was a striking and attractive woman still. Where Mr Pollard had made her acquaintance history sayeth not. All that his country neighbours knew about the matter was, that one summer he went away for his well-earned holiday a brisk, happy-hearted bachelor, and that he came back at the end

of two months with a sobered mien and a Mrs Pollard.

Whether she had been wife, widow, or maid he never stated, and no one either cared or dared to ask. She was a large, light-hearted, loud woman, who laughed *with* everyone at everything, and *at* everyone to everyone else when the other's back was turned. She had a tall, largely-developed figure, which looked well in loose garments in the house, and long, straight-lined cloaks out of it. A face that had been fair before, she had cold-creamed, powdered and painted it out of any resemblance to anything human. Hair that was sometimes carotty, and at others a greenish-yellow. And small penetrating deep-set grey eyes, that never by any chance

rested on the face of, or met the eyes of, the one she was addressing.

She had given out broadly, when she had come to the little Cornish town in which Dr Pollard's quaintly picturesque old house and gardens were spread out on a sunny slope, that she did not care for society as it existed here. She was devoted to gardening, the breeding of poultry and greyhounds, and anxious above all things to acquire the fine arts of riding and driving. She spoke vaguely of having at some remote period been a sort of female Centaur. But not even her husband believed her when she hinted this.

Her tastes, declared as above, were faultless enough. No one could say that they were anything but healthy

and expedient in a woman full of nerve and vigour, who was obliged to live in the country, and on whose hands time would probably have pressed heavily, if these resources had not made her independent of other people for her amusements.

But after awhile, it transpired that she had other resources for beguiling the time besides these innocent ones. She was an inveterate gossip, and her proclivities were the more dangerous, as she had an appalling habit of foisting her own remarks, conjectures and suspicions upon other people.

The accident to the fine, handsome man who had recently dropped from some unknown sphere into the ownership of Gunwalloe Place was a godsend to Mrs Pollard, who was feeling

rather dull at the time. In a burst of what she intended to appear as good Samaritanism, but which her husband rightly enough divined to be mere curiosity, she besought him to let her go to Wingates and constitute herself the sufferer's head nurse.

' You say those old ladies are half-senile, and that the younger one will most likely throw over Mr Treville and ensnare Mr Harlby if she's let nurse him. Much better that I—'

' Good heaven ! Augusta, what are you saying ? ' the harassed doctor interrupted angrily. ' I have never said or thought the elder ladies senile, or the younger one a schemer. It was you yourself who hinted at these things last night.'

'You are either an inveterate liar, or your memory is so bad, that you must be imbecile,' the wife replied fiercely and loudly — so loudly, in fact, that Dr Pollard, who guessed that his assistant and the servants would hear, closed the argument by saying meekly,—

'Well, well, my dear Gussie, I suppose that my memory is not quite as good as it was for trifles.'

'Then take care how you contradict me again,' she said stormily. 'I can read people through and through at a glance, and as soon as I saw that Miss Woodford in church last Sunday I fathomed her character. As you said, she is one of those demure, sly people, who try to throw one off one's guard, by being apparently all sweetness and gentleness. Adventuress is stamped on

the woman's face, and poor Mr Treville will rue the day he ever met her.'

'I never said she was sly and demure,' the doctor grunted.

'Really, Dr Pollard, I *cannot* submit to being made out a liar, because you haven't the courage of your opinions,' she said, with a great air of hardly-suppressed, furious indignation. 'If you didn't say it, who did, I should like to know? Don't try to foist your opinions on me! How could I form one about the girl when I've never even spoken to her?'

'Your imagination runs away with you at times.'

'My imagination ran away with me, indeed, when I imagined I should ever receive from *you*, a mere country

apothecary, the consideration which a gentleman would feel bound to show to his wife.'

'As for that a country doctor, with a practice such as mine, was not a bad forlorn hope for a woman in your position to snap up,' he said, roused to anger and unwary recrimination at last.

Then the storm burst, and over the scene that followed a decent veil shall be drawn.

The end of it was as usual. The doctor, sorely against his better judgment, gave in to his wife's determination to effect an entrance into Wingates, and offer her services as nurse dominant to Mr Harlby. She had by this time quite convinced herself that young Miss Woodford was an unscrupulous and designing person, against whom in behoved

her (Mrs Pollard) to caution Mr Harlby, and put Mr Treville on his guard. Her soul was eager for the fray! It was so long since she had been blessed with an opportunity of making mischief in a way that brought her own name well into publicity.

Having gained her point, and crumbled the opposition of the marital power into dust, she recovered her good temper, and arrived at Wingates a day or two after Mrs Herbert Harlby's advent in a hilarious frame of mind.

Rose Harlby had already won the good-will of everyone in the house—with one exception. The old aunts succumbed to her at once, the very first night of her appearance among them. Her candour, and the natural gaiety of heart, which shone through all her

actions and words, were much more in accordance with their ideas of what was suitable in young womanhood, than the stately reserve and unemotional demeanour of their own niece. It was to the warmly-demonstrative elderly ladies a delightful and hitherto untasted experience, to have a young and charming girly showering affectionate attentions on them, sitting on low stools at their feet, while they knitted or embroidered, and reading them all the news that interested them, and that tried their eyes to decipher for themselves.

Before she went to bed that first night at Wingates, Aunt John and Aunt Jane were in full possession of all the main incidents of Rose's career. They glowed sympathetically when, in fluent, forcible, heartfelt words she gave

them a word - portrait of her father, Colonel Sheldon. They kindled with admiration at the description of his manly stature, dignified, handsome face, and soldierly bearing. They were quite ready to drop the silent tear over his death and burial. And when she spoke of her marriage, and the reasons that had actuated her in making it, they gazed at her with fond commiseration, and heaved sighs of perfect understanding at each other.

Aunt John had never been a mother herself, and it is needless to say the same of Aunt Jane. But they were both women in whom the maternal instinct was strong, and when she told them about her baby, and her brief bright dream of his being a 'great English gentleman,' and of how she was

awakened from that dream on meeting with her now dearly valued friend, they were reduced to what Frances sorrowfully called pulp.

Frances had shrank away from her post in the sick-room, and into herself more than ever, since the widow with the winning mixture of womanly reliance in herself, and child-like trust in every one else had arrived. The bright stranger had the better right to minister to the needs of the unconscious man than she (Frances) or anyone else had. She admitted this fully, but the admission was a grim one to make. Mrs Herbert Harlby and the sufferer bore the same name. Oh! what a spasm of agony contracted Frances Woodford's heart as she thought this; and how she hated and feared

the name, in spite of what she felt for the masculine bearer of it.

She was standing out on the terrace, which ran along the severely substantial and plain south front of the house, wondering what the aunts and John Treville himself would say when she told them that she renounced all intention of marrying him, and becoming that house's mistress.

The prospect of doing this had no charms for her. There are some girls so peculiarly constituted, that however kind - hearted they may be in other matters, they feel a positive thrill of ecstasy at the idea of being spoken of as 'the girl who threw poor So-and-so over.' But Frances was not cast in this common-place cruel mould. She felt the same contempt for herself, for

her change of feeling and breach of faith and honour as she would have felt for any other jilt, male or females.

She did not think of the man who had asked her to marry him, whom she had accepted, and whom she was now preparing to throw over as ‘poor’ John Treville! She knew that he would be hurt, disgusted and indignant with her, and he would be justified in doing so. At the same time she knew that her defection would not materially affect his life, and would not alter the manner of it at all. The things that occupied his time and engrossed his attention now would continue to do so then. He would not whine and pine, or go heavily for a time on account of having lost her. But he would feel with all the

force of his moral rectitude that she had broken her part of a serious and important agreement, and that he had been defrauded.

Day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute nearly since Mr Harlby had been brought back wounded and in danger, she had resolved to make a clean break - of and have done with the engagement, which she had already broken in spirit, at once. And day after day she delayed, because of her faulty feeling, that she could not bear to leave until Harlby was out of danger. This day, however, the sense of her own meanness had made the condition of things unbearable to her. She vowed that she would speak to John Treville that afternoon, and rid him of a fraudulent presence before night.

Waiting on the terrace, intending to intercept and confess to him as he came home from shooting, she saw coming up the long fir-tree avenue the doctor's well-known smart dog-cart and fast-trotting mare. She saw, but took no particular notice of, the lady by the doctor's side, for Mrs Pollard's personality was unknown to her.

Frances kindled into happy animation, and one of her rare smiles glorified her face at once. Doctor Pollard had treated the 'case,' which was absorbing the current interest of every one of the inhabitants of Wингates with great skill. From the first he had said more about the possibilities that were in it of good or evil results to Frances Woodford, than

he had said to anyone else. A tacit understanding existed between them, that whatever happened, she was not to be lulled into a false security, or kept in the dark in any way. She always felt stronger and more hopeful after Doctor Pollard's visits. To-day, especially, her smile showed that she was glad.

Mrs Pollard saw the glad smile of greeting, and appropriated it to herself.

'She is flattered at my having come, takes the call to herself, and is pleased. There's good in the girl after all, and I won't hear a word against her from *anyone*.'

Parenthetically it may be mentioned, that no one had ever hinted a disparaging hint, or uttered a disparaging

word about John Treville's bride-elect, save Mrs Pollard herself.

'I'll put her on her guard against the flighty young widow, *as she calls herself*, from New York. Probably it's she who is the adventuress,' the doctor's wife thought excitedly. And filled with this benign intention she entered the house.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOCTOR'S WIFE.

THE two elder ladies, Mrs Gray and Aunt Jane, were out driving in the comfortable easy - sprunged carriage, which Mr Treville had put at their disposal, and which could be opened and closed at pleasure. They were innocent - minded, unselfish women, both of them, whom it was delightfully easy to entertain. In these October days, to drive about roads that were new to them, and come

upon little unexpected villages, and farm-houses surrounded by orchards, in which each individual bough on every tree was a thing of apple-laden beauty, gave them unceasing pleasure. The fresh air from the sea on one side, and the moors on the other, was a combination of nectar and quinine. They talked together quite cheerfully, as they were driven along the lovely roads, of how delightful it would be to come down here every autumn (Mr Treville had proved himself a perfect host), and witness Frances' happiness and content, and take in a stock of health that would enable them to enjoy the festive Bath winter.

They were out on one of these little driving excursions this day when

Mrs Pollard called, with a motive. Some thriving young Cornish jilly-flower apple trees had attracted their attention in a market-garden, and they were bent on becoming the possessors of these, and sending them up to their Bath garden, to be planted without delay.

Consequently, when the doctor went up to see his patient, Frances was left alone to entertain the doctor's wife, to whom, at first, she (Frances) gave a fitful attention, as her mind was absent, without leave, fatiguing itself with vain speculations as to what was going on in the sick-room.

Suddenly she recollects that she was neglecting a visitor of Mr Treville's, who had called, doubtless, for the

amiable purpose of showing them all courtesy.

Simultaneously with the recollection of her own social duty, she heard Mrs Pollard saying,—

‘The new and uninvited addition to the household here (as my husband tells me she is) must add considerably to the embarrassment and trouble which Mr Harlby’s accident has already caused Mr Treville.’

‘Mr Treville is the last man in the world to feel either embarrassed or troubled by any call on his friendship and hospitality,’ Frances said stoutly.

‘Oh, of course,’ Mrs Pollard laughed out with more noise than mirth. ‘Mr Treville is too kind - hearted not to make the best of things while that *unfortunate* man is unable to act for

himself. But it shows gross want of consideration for you all, that this woman from New York should have borne down upon you here while Harlby is still unable to act for himself.'

'Mrs Harlby is showing the sweetest consideration for everyone, and gratitude which is as beautiful as it is rare to Mr Harlby of Gunwalloe, for his kindness to her when she came over a stranger in the land expecting to rejoin her husband, and abruptly learning that she was a widow.'

Frances said this with angry emphasis. How dared this strange woman come and unjustly malign lovely loving Rose Harlby, though she (Frances herself) was already unjustly jealous of her.

'My dear child (I can speak to you in this way, as I am older than you are), I am afraid you are easily deluded. If Mrs Harlby, as she calls herself, came over from New York to rejoin a husband, she *has* rejoined him.'

'You don't mean—you don't imply that she is this Mr Harlby's wife?' Frances said coldly and calmly. But her equanimity was upset and blown into atoms by Mrs Pollard's next words.

'My dear Miss Woodford, your memory must be wandering! *I* mean, *I* imply! Why it is you yourself who have implied and *meant* that you regard the relations which you say are existing between Mr Harlby of Gunwalloe and this woman, who *says* she is another

man's widow, as compromising, to say the least of it.'

'I have never even thought of such a thing, much less meant or implied it.'

Then, as Mrs Pollard proceeded to assert and fulminate in a strident style, Frances went on clearly and incisively,—

'I am not a garrulous, not a gossiping woman, and I am a very accurate one. Besides this, other people's affairs have no interest whatever for me; apparently they have for you, as you have tried to discuss those of these strangers with me.'

These words were uttered under the influence of the instinct of self-preservation merely. They were defensive, not offensive. But Mrs

Pollard had a weirdly, hungry desire to put this last interpretation upon them.

'Really, Miss Woodford,' she began, speaking in a very high voice, and glancing fitfully from the left ear down to the shoulder and up again of the young lady whom she addressed, but avoiding the latter's eyes,—'Really, Miss Woodford, I must say you are both unjust and unreasonable. I came over here to-day actuated by a spirit of kindness, and now, you, after having spontaneously given me your opinion about this woman, who called herself Harlby, and about whom I know nothing, and would not hazard an opinion on any account, you draw back and accuse me of gossiping interference and libellous assertions. You—'

'I had better leave you to the society of the Persian cat, Tito,' Frances said quietly, rising up and making for the door. 'He will care very little what words you put into his mouth.'

It was an injudicious speech. Frances thought it was one before she had finished it.

She ordered that tea should be taken into the drawing-room for Mrs Pollard, and waited herself on the landing outside Mr Harlby's door until the doctor came out. Then she asked her usual question,—

'Tell me exactly how he is?'

And in listening to Dr Pollard's reply, she forgot all about his wife's errors of taste against her.

It was the first really satisfactory

account that the doctor had been able to give, and Frances felt all her own merely personal anxieties and troubles melt away as she listened to it. She never could be utterly unhappy again, now that she heard this stranger, whom she had only seen three times before his accident, would in all probability retain possession of his eye, though he would lose the sight of it. Further, that though there was a big flesh wound athwart his cheek, and the lower portion of one ear was mutilated past mending, there was no injury to the bones of the head and face, and the brain was untouched.

'He won't be a beauty man any more, but he'll always be a fine manly-looking fellow, and, please God, he'll live to see his sons shooting

pheasants in spite of old Bellair's blunder,' Dr Pollard said heartily, and for once, in spite of the cheerful prognostication, Frances thought the kind old man coarse and frivolous.

'He never was a beauty man; that phrase is suggestive of a vain empty-headed fop,' she said coldly.

'To be sure, to be sure,' Dr Pollard agreed, promptly; but it's a satisfaction to think that he won't be seriously disfigured, poor chap. There will be nothing repulsive about his appearance. Not that I suppose it would make much difference to that dear devoted little nurse of his if there was.'

'Why should it concern her?' Frances asked quickly. The doctor was putting on his gloves and pre-

paring to go. But she stopped him to ask the question, though she dreaded the answer.

'Why? Well, I suppose the romantically-begun story will have the proper ending. He'll owe as much to her tender unceasing solicitude as he will to my skill, and the best reward he can offer her will be his hand and heart. She has his name already, oddly enough; that's where the romance comes in.'

'Yes, that's where the romance comes in. As you say, the story can have but one ending. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Miss Woodford, I hope your aunts are well? My wife will think I am lost. Good-bye.'

He hurried downstairs, and Frances went to her own room. She had

heard her aunts drive up and come into the house, and she felt incapable of going down and lending a patient ear to the stream of chatter that would surely commence flowing when the old ladies and Mrs Pollard met.

The end of the story ! the fitting end ! By concluding in the way the doctor had suggested, the owner of Gunwalloe Place would be making restitution, would be partially expiating his fault.

‘What nonsense I am allowing myself to think,’ she declared to herself impatiently and angrily. Then she knelt down and tried to pray that the story might end as Dr Pollard thought it would.

Mrs Gray and her sister had come

into the drawing-room, bringing with them a good deal of the cheery briskness of the October atmosphere, and pleasant expectations of finding Rose Harlby, as well as their niece, waiting tea for them.

It was a surprise, and not a pleasant one, to find a large lady with an aggrieved expression, the only occupant of the room.

She regarded them superciliously, for she knew they were the aunts of the young lady who had refused to allow her words and meanings to be twisted into a scandalous tangle for Mrs Pollard's pleasure. To this young lady Mrs Pollard had taken a suspicious dislike. Illogically she was quite ready to extend the feeling to the aunts.

Their own perfect sincerity and graciousness made them apologise to her for her having been left alone, with a courtesy that disarmed her, and made that restless tiger, her ill-tempered vanity and selfishness, lie down for a time. Moreover, curiosity, an insatiable desire to be in the know about everyone with whom she came in contact, and so acquire power over them, was as strong a passion with her as was savagely vain selfishness.

She could be very pleasing—more than this, very charmingly attractive—when she liked, to both men and women. To gain a very small end, she would slip on the cloak of desire to please, and be pleased, over wounded vanity, baffled ambition or curiosity, and even the offensive ferocity

which was always aroused by any opposition to her wishes, whims, and plans.

She slipped this convenient garment on now, and Aunt John and Aunt Jane both thought it a most admirable one and saw nothing beneath it.

In return for the courteously cordial greeting which the old ladies gave to the lady, whom they found sitting in solitude in their future nephew's drawing-room, she briefly introduced herself, and apologised for not having called on them before.

'But the fact is,' she added, 'before I had time to do so (my time is very fully occupied. I rarely have an hour to waste in the tomfoolery of calling, or going to those dreary functions, "At Homes"), this accident happened, and

other strange things which naturally made one rather dubious about coming!'

'Other strange things!' Aunt John repeated wonderingly.

'Yes, according to rumour, but then we all know how rumour lies. Probably there was no truth in that one young lady constituting herself Mr Harlby's head nurse until an altogether unexpected *another* young lady appeared upon the scene and ousted the first one from her post!'

'It is quite true that my niece, my sister, and myself did all we could in in the way of nursing Mr Harlby when he was brought here wounded, and, as we all thought, dying. It is also quite true that our services have not been needed since a very sweet

young creature, the widow of another Mr Harlby, a lady to whom this Mr Harlby has been more than kind, came to try and repay him, as well as she can, by nursing him in his hour of need.'

Aunt John spoke seriously and with dignity. Neither the seriousness nor the dignity impressed Mrs Pollard. That lady threw her head back and laughed long and loudly.

'You would baffle the Lord Chamberlain himself if you were going to write a risky story for the stage,' she said, at last checking her ebullition of mirth in a way that engendered a suspicion as to its being genuine.

'I don't understand,' Aunt John protested in bewilderment, at which Mrs Pollard laughed again, and de-

clared it was all awfully amusing to her, and that she should watch the unravelling of various mysteries with much amusement.

'What are the mysteries? We know of none,' Aunt Jane asked stiffly.

'Well, in the first place, we simple country folks' (Mrs Pollard curled her supple lips into a sneer of utter contempt at the idea of anyone being fool enough to fancy that she belonged to the order of 'simple country folk'), 'we're a good deal staggered at the appearance of an heir to Gunwalloe Place, after one had been advertised for unsuccessfully for more than five years; and, in the next place, it is curious, isn't it, that a Mrs Herbert Harlby, with a baby Harlby, should

turn up, and devote herself to Harlby of Gunwalloe, and yet say she is not *his* wife, but the widow of another man.'

'It is odd,' Aunt John unwarily admitted.

'I saw your niece just now,' Mrs Pollard went on with an air of noble savage candour. 'I am afraid I wounded her feelings terribly by something I said relative to the *extraordinary* devotion exhibited by this widow from New York to Mr Harlby. I spoke quite innocently, but your niece so evidently identifies herself with Mr Harlby's cause, that I am quite sorry I spoke.'

'It's absurd to say that our niece identified herself with Mr Harlby's cause,' Aunt Jane answered angrily,

'She is going to be married very shortly to Mr Treville.'

'Is she?' Mrs Pollard interrupted, with another burst of laughter.

'And as a future neighbour, and a friend of her future husband's, she naturally takes an interest in Mr Harlby,' Aunt Jane wound up triumphantly. Mrs Pollard raised her voice and was replying when she was untowardly interrupted.

CHAPTER X.

A FAIR GHOULE.

THE untoward interruption was caused by the entrance of Dr Pollard, closely followed by Mrs Harlby, who had rushed down to ask him ‘If he thought she might with safety leave her patient for a few hours the next day in order to go over to Fowey to see her baby?’

‘Certainly! certainly! I’m sure you may with safety trust our good friend to the care of Miss Woodford, and

these dear ladies here,' he added, as he caught his wife's quick, shifty glance.

Then, as Rose came further into the room, Aunt John rose to meet her, and said tenderly,—

' You dear child, it's a treat to hear that you will go out to-morrow. Frances and Jane and I will take it in turns to look after him. Let me give you some tea, dear.'

' This is Mrs Harlby, I feel sure, but no one seems to think it worth while to introduce me to her, though my call is intended to be on you as well as on these other ladies,' Mrs Pollard put in suavely.

Rose responded to the suavity at once, as soon as she found that the affable stranger was the wife or the earnest, devoted, skilful doctor who

had treated Mr Harlby so successfully.

'How good of you to come,' Rose said gratefully; 'but everyone is good to me in this dear old country.'

'Do you contemplate remaining here?' Mrs Pollard asked blandly.

'Here? do you mean in England?' Rose asked.

'Yes; but I suppose that would be too great a sacrifice to expect of you. You must have so many ties, so many interests in New York.'

'Oh! I *hated* New York,' Rose cried with energy. 'I have no ties, no interests, no friends there; I never had any from the time my father died."

'I suppose Mr Harlby was necessarily much away from you, then?' Mrs Pollard said significantly.

'No!' Rose blushed at being caught out in this way, but would not retract her words; 'but he had friends, and interests, and ties of his own which were independent of me,' she added, with a light laugh, at the recollection of the many tearful farewells that had been spoken between her husband and his company of fair ones before he left New York the last time.

'You will soon form fresh ones in England, I feel sure,' Mrs Pollard said, rising in obedience to her husband's signal for departure. Then she went away well satisfied with her visit, and in perfect peace and charity with herself, for she saw possibilities of extracting a good deal of pastime of an exciting nature from the party at Wингates before it broke up.

'One ought to take one's words out of one's mouth and look at them before one utters them to Mrs Pollard,' Aunt John remarked, more testily than she had ever spoken in her life before.

'She seems suspicious of everyone,' old Miss Woodford said meditatively.

'I wonder if it was "suspicion" of me which made her ask me so many questions about myself?' Rose asked lightly. 'If I had thought it anything but kindness, *wouldn't* I have baffled her, and sent her off on all sorts of wrong scents.'

'She has evidently taken a dislike to Frances. I suppose Frances was cool and stand-off to her; she is to some people, you know.' Aunt John spoke the last words apologetically to Rose.

'I know,' Rose said, nodding her head slowly in meditative assent; 'but she would never be cool or stand-off unreasonably; there must always be something at the bottom of it to make her so.'

'I wonder what's at the bottom of Mrs Pollard's attempts to make us feel uncomfortable this afternoon? Could it be only want of tact? or was it want of heart?' Aunt John suggested hazard-ing the paraphrasical quotation with a modest little smile of deprecation.

'It's the first time I've heard anyone's motives questioned since I've been here. I hope she won't come again. If it's want of tact we'll forgive her. A woman had better never be born than be born without tact. If it's want of heart, the less we see

of her the better. Now I am going to read the doings of the day to you. It's so funny to me to read about the movements, as if they were of vital importance, of people of whom one cares nothing, and for whom one cares less,' Rose said, as she picked up the *World* and turned to what Atlas says.

'I must confess,' Mrs Gray said, after three or four paragraphs had been read, 'that I do like to hear how and where the Queen is, and how the Princess is looking. I remember seeing the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh (Prince Alfred he was then) in kilts, at a review at Aldershot. Dear little boys they looked, with such pretty legs!'

'I wonder how they would look in kilts now?' remarked Rose.

'And I always take an interest in

what the prime minister's wife is doing—whatever the prime minister may be,' said Aunt Jane; 'the strain upon them must be dreadful at times, especially when they're getting on in years, and the opposition journals pick holes in their husbands' policy.'

'But you don't care to hear what Lady Crooke wore at church parade on Sunday; or that Lady Libertyhall, in sapphire velvet and diamonds, looked lovelier than her superbly-beautiful youngest daughter at Mrs de Shoddy's ball, do you?' Rose asked.

'Well, I don't know. One hears of these people—at least, one sees their names in the papers constantly, and it seems to make them more real and life-like when one hears what they wore.'

'Then I'll go right through the fashionable intelligence with pleasure, if it gives you a minute's satisfaction,' said Rose heartily. 'Let me see! First I'll read what the fashions are, and then, when we're posted up in the "dress article," I'll go on to where people are, what they're doing, and what they're on the brink of wearing. There are awful depths of fatuously bad taste into which women with no heaven-born feeling for dress may tumble this coming winter season. Listen!

"We learn on the best authority—namely, our own observation—that the neat, tailor-made, serviceable girl will be altogether out of it this year at the 'meets' both of foxhounds and beagles, as also on the ice, should

King Frost re-introduce the fashion of skating - parties. It it may be remarked, in passing, that no woman who respects herself will measure more than twenty inches round the waist; but from shoulder to shoulder (extreme points) she must be at least a yard across—or contemptible.””

‘I think we wont trouble you to read us any more verbiage of this kind, Rose. Tell us now what people are doing,’ Aunt John said, as she leant back in a cosy chair and prepared to doze while the exciting intelligence was read to her.

Rose skimmed lightly over the lightly - written paragraphs. The aunts heard how one notable lady had lost her jewels, another her reputation, a third her title to estates, which her

besotted old husband had not had the right to leave to her.

Rose's light-laughing, clever, sweetly-bitter commentary ran like a thread of silver through it all.

Suddenly the silver thread snapped, as her eyes rested on a paragraph which concerned herself, and was of an utterly different character to the flimsy, fashionable frivolity from which she had been extracting amusement for her dear old ladies.

To the majority the paragraph in question would have been singularly uninteresting. It ran as follows:—

‘Mrs Gaston, a wealthy and well-known New York hostess, has arrived in London. The lady, though on pleasure bent, seems determined to

combine business with it, as she has already started inquiries relative to the death of a certain gentleman who left New York some months since, avowedly to take possession of some family property in England. Mrs Gaston is a handsome woman of—any age she pleases, as she brings no daughters to date her.'

Rose Harlby read and re-read this paragraph with quickened breath and dilating eyes. She had neither loved her husband, nor tried to lie either herself or other people into the belief that she had done so. But she had always acted in a way that left the world no opportunity of saying that she did not respect him. Her blood boiled now with young, fresh, honest

rage when she read that this ‘handsome woman, who was any age she pleased,’ had come over to disinter the soiled and soiling reputation of the boastful braggart who had been as openly at Mrs Gaston’s feet as he had been at those of half-a-dozen other popular and pleasure-giving women. The audacity of the move, which aimed at taking what should have been her (Rose’s) work, if it had to be done at all, out of her hands, outraged her almost beyond silent endurance. Yet some undefinable feeling of caution, which was altogether foreign to her free, open nature, restrained her from saying a word relative to the subject of her annoyance to anyone.

‘I must wait till he is better and

able to advise me. How angry *he* will be, that I should be subjected to such an insult from one of those horrible women.'

'You look quite white and tired, dear,' Aunt Jane said presently, led by the silence to look at the one who had been leading so buoyantly two or three minutes ago.

'How selfish we are, of course; the dear child is tired,' Aunt John put in, bending down to look at the pretty agitated face. 'Shut up in that room watching poor Mr Harlby! it's too bad of us to have made you read. A run up and down the terrace before dinner will freshen you up. And think, you'll see your little boy to-morrow.'

'I wish I could see him now. I hope no horrible woman will ever take him

from me,' Rose said, with seeming irrelevance, as she rose up and sent the paper, which contained the offensive paragraph, whipping away over the floor into an obscure corner. Then she went out and tried to walk off her mortification at this uncalled-for interference of Mrs Gaston's, until the dressing-bell rang.

The aunts, meanwhile, having mistaken the cause of her emotion, resolved to make a final appeal to their future nephew that very night, to induce him to ask the Harlby baby and its nurse to come and stay at Wингates.

'She has borne up bravely, but she is evidently fretting for her child,' they said to Frances, when the latter came down dressed for dinner.

'If absence from her child is so painful, it's rather strange she should stay away from it voluntarily,' Frances replied. Then, ashamed of her own unjust jealousy, she added quickly,—

'Not but what I should do exactly what she is doing, if I felt grateful, as she does, to Mr Harlby.'

'He certainly has behaved nobly—nobly!' Aunt John, who had got hold of several frayed-ends of the story, said warmly, 'paying the last tokens of respect that can be paid to the dead to her poor husband, and then looking after her child's interests.'

Frances winced, and interrupted the stream of eulogy. It was the first time in her life that she had been guilty of the solecism of interrupting anyone who was speaking. But Aunt

John's words, innocently spoken, cut her to-day.

'John is late? or is it that the afternoon has been made unusually long by the invasion of that awful person, Mrs Pollard. Where's the *World*, I wonder? Have you seen it, Aunt John?'

'Rose was reading it aloud to us before she went out. She threw it over there somewhere.'

The old lady indicated a dark space where the shaded lamp-light failed to penetrate. Frances got up and groped about in search of the paper in the semi-darkness. In doing this she knocked over a small stand which sustained a huge Doulton ware pot, in which a fine thorn-fern, which was specially prized by John Treville, was growing. The pot was

broken, and the fern shot out and considerably bruised and soiled by the mould. Naturally this incident did not tend to restore Frances's unsettled mood to fair.

'I wish Mrs Harlby would not gaily and girlishly throw newspapers into space when she has done with them, but would put them down on a table, as other grown-up and merely commonplace women do,' she said, pettishly, as she came back into the light.

'She is little more than a child,' Aunt John said, with injudicious kind-heartedness; 'besides,' she added, launching a ready tear, 'she is an orphan.'

'Oh! we're all orphans as far as that goes,' Frances said impatiently. Then the absurdity of allowing herself to be upset by these minor miseries,

while there were so many more important matters at stake, struck her, and she added laughingly,—‘I had better ring and have the ruin I have made swept up. John will not feel for his fern so much if he doesn’t see its broken fronds, and I’ll go to Falmouth to-morrow and match the pot before he knows that this one is no more.’

‘I am sure Mr Treville regards everything in the house as yours as much as his, already,’ Aunt Jane said cheerfully. Whereat Frances shrugged her pretty, white, chiffon-frilled shoulders, as she said,—

‘Not at all. He has a strong sense of what belongs to posterity. Wингates, and all that appertaineth therunto, belongs to the Trevilles that are yet unborn. If we were married

to-morrow, John wouldn't be silly enough to say, "All that's mine is thine, lassie," and as we may never be married at all—'

'Frances!'

"'Twixt cup and lip there's many a slip,'" Frances quoted, as she sunk back on a grandly carved, quaint old Jacobean chair, and dipped into the columns of the *World*.

Coming home from some preserves, which he had rented on the other side of the little town-village where Dr Pollard lived, John Treville turned in at the doctor's door to ask for the latest information concerning his friend and guest Mr Harlby. Mrs Pollard advanced from the drawing-room to meet him, still with her hat and cloak on.

'Mr Pollard is in the surgery. He will be here in a minute. Come in, Mr Treville, and warm yourself by the fire, while I get you a glass of cherry brandy,' she said heartily, for she wanted to drop a word or two into his ear.

'Thanks, I'll stand by the fire for a minute or two, but no cherry brandy, please. I never drink between meals. Pollard been over to Wingates this afternoon?'

'Yes, and I went with him, and really, Mr Treville, as your friend, I do not feel justified in keeping something I observed to myself. I *must* tell you.'

CHAPTER XI.

WELL MATCHED.

MRS GASTON had liked the loud laughing, large-teethed Englishman as well as she had liked any of the many men who had won her temporary favours, and shown themselves ready to ‘part’ freely for her pleasure. But her reason in making as much noise as she could in the society papers, about her resolve to track out the manner and the means of his unexplained disappear-

ance from the ken of herself and others of the New York queens of his soul, was not disinterested regard for him. She wanted to ‘boom herself,’ as she phrased it, and it occurred to her that the most efficacious mode of doing this would be to ventilate the case of a vanished man, who had confided to her in a letter which she had kept, that he ‘was the heir to a fine old property in one of the western counties of England.’

To ‘boom’ herself and go up aloft into that uppermost circle of London society, in which royalty revolved, was her desire and intention. Even if she exploded when she got up there was not of much consequence. Nothing could really shatter her. She had more money than even her wastefulness could

seriously diminish, for her husband was always making fresh piles, and so long as she forebore to ask him awkward questions, he let her help to spend these piles with both hands.

Needless to say, she forebore to ask awkward questions.

In addition to the delicious sensation of booming herself, by means of her publicly - expressed curiosity respecting the fate of Mr Herbert Harlby, of New York, Mrs Gaston had the pleasing anticipation of mortifying Mr Herbert Harlby's widow. She (Mrs Gaston) knew that the man who had loved whate'er he looked on, and whose looks had gone everywhere, had reposed the same half-insulting, half-flattering confidences respecting his hopes and intentions to a dozen other women

besides herself. She also knew that his wife had not been among this dubiously-distinguished dozen.

Mrs Gaston knew that when she had well stirred up the smouldering fire of gossip and conjecture concerning the fate of Harlby, of New York, that some of the smoke would inevitably hang about, and possibly cloud and slightly defile her name and reputation. But this was a contingency that did not alarm her in the least. She had absolutely nothing to lose; so she was able to assume the virtue of absolute fearlessness. The conveniently-absent Gaston had made her independent of the world, including himself. She was thickly environed by satellites who amused her, and whom she liked, and these she knew would stick close to

her as the limpet does to the rock, while she had the power of sustaining them (monetarily). The English set into which she aspired to get was more likely to accord her a free pass into its sacred precincts, if a savoury scent hung around her name, than if it were impregnated with the ‘holier odour—the odour of pansies.’ Understanding all this she put forth her paragraphs, and waited.

She had not to wait long. A kindred spirit, of whose existence she was unconscious yet, read and responded to the wily note of defiance which she had sounded in the weekly press.

The response came in the shape of a type-written anonymous letter, and as it was posted in St Martin’s - le-

Grand, it would have been a difficult matter to track it to its source, even had Mrs Gaston desired to do so. As a matter of fact, she did not desire to do this. She knew that if she waited, the source would come to her.

‘Mrs Gaston is informed’ (so the letter ran) ‘that Mrs Herbert Harlby, of New York, widow, is nursing Mr Harlby, of Gunwalloe Place, bachelor, who is lying dangerously ill from the effects of a gun accident at Wingates, the house of his friend Mr Treville, near Fowey, in Cornwall. Harlby, of New York, died in a railway carriage under suspicious circumstances. No one knows anything of the present owner of Gunwalloe Place. A letter addressed to “*Justitia, Poste Restante, Plymouth,*”

will be replied to by one who abhors false pretences.'

Mrs Gaston addressed a letter to 'Justitia,' asking for fuller information on the subject of the New York widow, the present owner of Gunwalloe Place, and the death in a railway carriage of a man called Harlby.

In reply to this there came another type-written letter from 'Justitia,' recommending a brief sojourn at Cawsand to Mrs Gaston, and hinting that from that secluded and safe 'vantage-ground inquiries, which might lead to exciting results, could be pursued with safety. The names of a Mrs Jones, of The Breakwater View Cottage, was given as that of a highly desirable landlady, and Mrs Gaston was adjured, in con-

clusion, to be ‘unhasting, unresting in pursuit of her God-given quest.’

Mrs Gaston read this letter attentively, laughed at the evident animus of the writer against some of the people concerned, and as she liked exciting results, and longed to boom her name in connection with a possibly criminal case, wrote again to ‘Justitia,’ saying that she would be at Cawsand in a week’s time.

Accordingly, within a week, another announcement appeared in the society papers with regard to Mrs Gaston.

‘The beautiful Mrs Gaston, of New York, is driving her numerous admirers wild with despair by her determination to bury herself for a time in the remote little Cornish fishing village of Cawsand, where she hopes

to obtain from some living representatives of the Harlby family some information respecting the last days and sad end of Mr Harlby, of New York, who died (it is stated) under mysterious circumstances in the past summer. Mrs Gaston regards this as a sacred duty, as the deceased gentleman's widow is apparently too crushed by sorrow to take any steps towards elucidating the mystery. Mr Harlby was the last survivor of the old race, and heir to Gunwalloe Place.'

'That will be a bad one for all whom it may concern,' Mrs Gaston thought, as she sent off duplicates of this paragraph to several of the weekly papers. But if it was a 'bad one' for several people, it was a good one apparently for Mrs Pollard,

who seemed to have an instinct for finding it out, and teaching it unctuously with dramatic emphasis to her husband.

‘There will be a terrible, terrible scandal at Wingates and Gunwalloe Place before long, I feel sure. Happily, *I* have done my best to avert it, by trying to open the eyes of that poor bat, John Treville,’ she said, with a strident laugh to her husband one day after having pursued him into the surgery to read the local paper’s copy of the paragraph.

‘You’ll be good enough, perhaps, not to mix yourself up with this woman and her investigations, Augusta? I know you often find your life dull, but, for God’s sake, don’t try and enliven it by throwing mud at

people, and dragging me through it.'

The harassed doctor spoke warmly and manfully. It quite cheered her to find that she had discovered a new mode of tormenting, and so bending him to her will.

'I like Americans, and shall certainly call on this Mrs Gaston,' she said, loudly and defiantly. 'She must be a grand, brave woman to risk being misunderstood in the cause of friendship, by taking up the work that that nasty little giggling, flirty widow of his ought to have done. I think it's perfectly disgusting that the woman should throw herself at Gunwalloe in the way she does, for, of course, it's the place, not the man, she wants.'

'Why, the other day you were saying that you believed she was this Harlby's wife!' the doctor was goaded into saying.

'May you be forgiven the atrocious falsehood,' she cried, with strongly simulated indignation. 'It was *you* who made the suggestion to me, and coming from you, who pride yourself so much on your caution, I admit I did entertain the idea for a time. But now I feel it was a poor error, one of those coarse blunders you are so apt to make. I have no doubt as to her being the widow of the poor man who lost his life in the railway carriage in which he and your precious patient were travelling alone, and I feel sure that the woman who has entrapped

poor Mr Treville is an accomplice.'

'Have you ever heard of such a thing as an action for libel?' Doctor Pollard asked savagely. Whereupon his stalwart better half threw her head back and laughed loudly and long.

'You would be the defendant in the case, my dear,' she said at last. 'For I get all my information from you, and I should give up my informant without scruple.'

'You would ruin me!' he said aghast; and she, seeing that her threats had power to alarm him, as he was honourable, conscientious, and altogether without reproach in the matter of preserving professional confidences, blurted out with coarse merriment,—

‘Without hesitation, my friend, in order to save myself. I only married you to save myself, for, before I did so, I knew you to be a white-livered hound, who pandered to Mrs Grundy and respectability. *I* care for neither of these powers, and if, with the aid of Mrs Gaston, I can find a weak place in the armour of your county swell at Gunwalloe Place, *I shall do it.* Now, how do you propose putting the drag on my determination?’

‘You stagger me, Augusta. I have loved and trusted you, but you are shocking me out of all affection or respect.’

Back went her head, and out rang the cruel insulting, coarse laugh.

‘I’ll stagger and shock you more

before I've done with you, if you defy or annoy me,' she said, as she flung out of the room, banging the door behind her in a way that made all the medicine bottles jump. It took him some little time to quiet these and his own perturbed spirit. When he had done this latter, by dint of repeatedly assuring himself that 'Augusta never meant half she said,' he went out on one of his longest and dullest 'rounds,' winding up for mental and social refreshment with a call in at Wingates, where he found Mr Harlby sitting out of bed for the first time, and Rose Harlby reading to him.

Meanwhile Mrs Pollard had taken the train to Plymouth, crossed from the Admiral's Ward to Cremyl, driven in a waggonette, behind a long horse

thinly covered with hair, to Cawsand, and was now walking up the zig-zaggy little street to Breakwater View Cottage to call on Mrs Gaston.

It was a queer little place in which to look for the ‘beautiful popular,’ and it may be added, ‘flashy’—New York society woman.

A little wicket-gate admitted the visitor to a steep flight of steps which led down into a trimly kept little garden in which stood the neat little square cottage called Breakwater View. The entrance door in the centre opened straight upon a steep staircase. To the right was a tiny dining-room. To the left an equally tiny drawing-room. Above these were two bedrooms commanding magnificent views of the harbour and the opposite Devon coast.

These were the apartments devoted to the use of Mrs Gaston and her maid. They had been there twelve hours, and were already heartily sick of the picturesque and healthy little Cornish fishing village.

'I have come on a fool's errand after all,' Mrs Gaston was saying discontentedly to herself when the door was cautiously opened by her quiet little landlady, who murmured discreetly,—

'A lady to see you, ma'am. She would not give her name, so I did not admit her!'

'Quite right! I mean, show her in,' Mrs Gaston said hurriedly. The next moment a large fair woman made a dramatically effusive entrance, saying emphatically,—

'I am Justitia! you, I presume,

are my unknown correspondent, Mrs Gaston?’

She asked the question in a way that subtly conveyed to Mrs Gaston that she (*Justitia*) did not entirely endorse the press verdict, which declared the fair New Yorker to be ‘beautiful and attractive.’

‘I don’t like *Justitia*; she’s too egotistical to be pleasant, but she’ll play the game for me if I let her think I’m wax in her hands,’ Mrs Gaston thought as she was saying,—

‘I guessed you’d be what you are, a real woman of the world, with “talent” stamped on every square yard of you. You’re one of the great county ladies, I’m sure; I know the sort though I’ve only been in London society a few weeks, and I’m real glad to see you.’

'The late Mr Harlby was a *friend* of yours?' Mrs Pollard asked significantly.

The other lady smiled. 'Friendly as far as I'd let him be,' she said briefly.

'And his wife was not?'

'She didn't come into the case while he was alive. But if you pan out as well as you have led me to think you will, she will come into the case now,' Mrs Gaston replied, with a pale smile playing over her face. 'But, before we go any further, what's *your* motive?

'I am tired of leading a useless inactive life,' Mrs Pollard began warmly. 'If I can help you to right a wrong, I shall do so without any hope of a reward. I am a very independent woman, Mrs Gaston, but when people come to me for advice, I give it to them

straight out from the shoulder. I never betray a confidence; your secret with regard to the late Mr Harlby, of New York, is quite safe with me.'

'My secret!'

'Oh, yes,' Mrs Pollard laughed out hilariously. 'I read between the lines. My dear Mrs Gaston, you may quite rely on my sympathy, support, and discretion. The mere fact of your responding to the letters signed 'Justitia,' show how deeply involved your heart and interests were with the dead man. Trust me! Avoid holding any kind of communication with his widow and the man who owns Gunwalloe Place. My husband is professionally interested in the case; in fact, he is a surgical specialist, and has been consulted about the gun accident.'

'The country doctor would be more useful to me,' said Mrs Gaston slyly. 'A London specialist won't know all the family ins and outs.'

'We—my husband and I—live in the country near Wingates and Gunwalloe Place,' said Mrs Pollard loftily. 'He is not the less a specialist because he lives in the country.'

'We shall get on now,' Mrs Gaston said, with cheery malice. 'While I thought you a great county lady, I was on my P's and Q's, but now I know you're only the local doctor's wife, I feel better. You've offered me your services, *Justitia*, by letter, and I've kept the letters, and you have come here in person to repeat the offer. I'll have your services. What do you want for them?'

'My services!' gasped Mrs Pollard.

'Yes, your services; if you didn't mean to give them, why have you interfered in this matter? You're a very clever woman, but you're out of your depth now! I have your letter; you have come here and refused your name to my landlady, but you've admitted you're 'Justitia' to me. You're a big, fair, painted-up woman, who would be remarked by everyone. You don't want to be exposed as an amateur detective and anonymous letter - writer in your own neighbourhood; but, unless you work on my lines, I'll expose you.'

'You're a dangerous, intriguing woman!' Mrs Pollard raved loudly in her anger and amazement, think-

ing by that a show of fine frenzy she could bluster down her opponent.

Her opponent only smiled.

‘Tell me all you know of the antecedents of this Mr Harlby of Gunwalloe Place?’

‘I know nothing. He dropped from the clouds, or some other sphere equally unknown, apparently. He is very reticent.’

‘You must break through that barrier. You’re evidently not a timid woman,’ Mrs Gaston said, smiling still more sweetly than before. ‘Tell me, who came with him from the unknown sphere?’

‘No one; he came alone—that is, a dog came with him, a greyhound.’

‘A greyhound! What colour, what

name!' Mrs Gaston asked, kindling up and ceasing to smile.

'A golden yellow, very large hound; his name, I believe, is Cavae. I am interested in him, as he is a splendid dog, and I breed greyhounds.'

'And I am interested in him, as I bred such a dog as you describe, called him Cavae, and gave him to my late friend, Mr Herbert Harlby.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT'S OVER.

JOHN TREVILLE had gone home after the ten minutes' conversation with Mrs Portland, which that lady had inveigled him into, with a doubt in his mind for the first time as to the wisdom of his choice of a wife.

The doctor's wife had fluently hinted at several unpleasant things in the course of that brief interview. She had dwelt on the marvellous, almost magnetic, attraction which Harlby of

Gunwalloe Place obviously possessed for all the women folk then assembled at Wingates; and while affecting to deplore her sex's infatuation, she gave him to understand that it was one from which it was next to impossible they could ever recover.

'That frivolous, fast little widow from New York is almost indelicate in her devotion to her late husband's namesake,' Mrs Pollard declared emphatically, and John Treville listened and said nothing.

'Miss Woodford is so nice in every respect, I am sure, that I should be quite sorry if the glamour were thrown over her also, but naturally you would be alive to the possibility of such a catastrophe and avert it.'

She spoke eagerly, in quick, incisive

tones, and John Treville thought pityingly of his old friend the doctor who was mated to, and so in a measure responsible for, the utterances of this mischief-maker.

'I am so alive to everything that concerns Miss Woodford and her well-being, that I'll say good evening to you, Mrs Pollard, before you have time to say anything more about her,' he said coolly; then, before she could excuse herself, or accuse anyone else, he walked away out of her house, leaving her with the baffled feeling of not having made as mischievous a mess of things as she had intended doing.

All the way home Mr Treville thought of Frances, and of Frances only. He had been fond of her in

his cool, rather dry way for a long time, ever since he had taken the step of asking her to marry him, in fact. But now this woman's idle words had made him comprehend how very dear Frances was to him. He was not an emotional man by any means, but he felt his eyeballs grow hot, and a choking sensation in his throat, as he thought that if it was with Frances, as that interfering woman had hinted, it was his plain duty to offer to release her, and so give her the chance of being happy in her own way.

He had been so absorbed by other things lately, that he had not been very observant of Frances; but now, looking back upon her manner by the light of Mrs Pollard's remarks, he saw that she had been quieter and more

reserved even than usual, and she had always been a quiet and reserved girl. But latterly this reserve had amounted to absolute depression. He understood it all now, so he thought.

He had not entered into the engagement in a romantic spirit, as has been already told. But he was aware now that his heart had become very closely bound to the woman he had been regarding as his future wife for so many months. It was insupportable and cruelly unjust that this stranger should have won her from him without an effort.

He did not, for a moment, attach any blame to her, or feel any scorn for what some men would have termed her fickleness. His great desire was that she should be happy. It would have

been his joy and pride, in an unobtrusive way, to have made her so, had he been allowed to try, but, as it was—well, he would offer no obstacle to the other fellow doing it.

Would the other fellow embrace the opportunity that he (John Treville), resolved to give? Yes; he felt sure that the opportunity would be embraced. Frances was not a girl to entertain an unrequited affection for any man. It was astonishing, now that he was about to lose her, how clear-visioned he became about her character, and how thoroughly he gauged it.

The house party had hardly got over Mrs Pollard's call by the time the master of the house entered. The doctor's wife had jarred upon them all,

and set all the finer chords in their natures jangling out of tune. That curious mixture of apparently irrepressible frankness, and apparently irrepressible suspicion in her manner, had affected them more than any one of them would have liked to admit, and made them distrustful of the others. Even the dear old aunts felt that it would have been better, perhaps, had Mr Harlby been taken to Gunwalloe Place after the accident, and that Frances had not come to Wingates till she came as Mrs Treville. As for Rose, they could not make up their minds to wish she had never left New York. But in view of the depression which reigned throughout dinner that day, they thought several things 'a pity!'

Mr Treville had made up his mind to speak straightforwardly to Frances in offering her the release from their engagement. He would be lucid, leaving nothing to be ‘understood’ or ‘misunderstood.’ He thought Mrs Pollard a garrulous, interfering, malicious-minded woman for having hinted to him that a glamour had been thrown over the girl he was engaged to by another man. But he would not work like a mole in the dark. She should have ample opportunity of weighing the hint at its due worth, and refuting it if she felt so disposed.

‘One thing, I shall take her word for anything against Mrs Pollard or the whole world as far as that goes,’ he thought. ‘She will never deceive

me. If she has taken a fancy to Harlby, she will tell me so.'

He was not a man to halt on the brink, when a plunge into troubled waters was either compulsory or desirable. He made a move into the room where he kept his guns and fishing - tackle, foxes' brushes, otter heads and skins, stags' antlers, and other trophies of his bow and spear. When the ladies had gone to the drawing - room after dinner, he sent a message asking Frances to come and speak to him, and Frances obeyed the summons without an instant's hesitation. The time had come, she felt, for her to tell him that she must give up the idea of marrying him.

It struck her as strange that he

should not have his cigarette between his lips when she went in. It was their custom to spend twenty minutes or half-an-hour together in the gun-room every evening, and he generally smoked and talked about his inventions all the time. This evening he was neither smoking nor bending over his models. He was standing by the mantelpiece looking down into the fire, wondering why it was that he had never known how happy he had been till the continuance of this happiness was threatened.

She went up to him unfalteringly, looking sweeter and more graceful in her white dinner-dress than she had ever looked before, he fancied. His eyeballs grew hot again as he looked down into the eyes that

had taken an extra tinge of sadness lately.

'I was coming when you sent for me,' she began; 'I was coming to tell you that I can't be cruel and unjust enough to marry you, John. Through no fault of mine or yours, I am placed in a position that leaves me no choice. I must go out of your life.'

'Then it's true?' he said piteously.

'What is true?'

'What that woman, Mrs Pollard, has been suggesting to me this evening, that you're infatuated with Harlby. There, Frances, I have told you what I would give a year of my life not to believe to be true.'

'I am not indulging in any foolish, unwomanly, unsought feeling for Mr Harlby, as that woman has dared to

hint to you,' she said proudly. ' In breaking off my engagement with you—in putting myself to exquisite pain, and, I am afraid, hurting you who are so good to me, I shall break with every tie and every acquaintance I have formed down here.'

' But it is—is it?—love for him which makes you do it?' he urged.

' No!' she said firmly, throwing up her head, and meeting his miserable eyes steadily. ' If I had weakly let myself be treacherous enough to love and idolise him, I would have killed the silly sentiment and never let you suspect it. I would have married you, and been a good wife to you, if it had only been *love* for Mr Harlby.'

' What is it, then? Frances, tell me all that's in your mind. Think of the

waste my life will be without you. Let me try to make you happy, dear. I won't ever again ask you, as I did a minute ago, to tell me what this spectre is that you have raised! Without seeing or knowing it, I will defy it for you.'

'Think of what I shall have to go back to, and then ask yourself if I would give up the peace, and comfort, and luxury, and power of making other people happy, which a marriage with you would imply for any, but the strongest reasons? My aunts will want me to live with them, and be treated as their daughter; but I should hate to be dependent, so I shall go back to work that never has been and never will be congenial to me.'

'Harlby will never let you do that.

If I am to lose you, I won't be cur enough to grudge you happiness with the other man.'

'I hope I may never see him again, John. There is no power on earth would make me marry Mr Harlby, even if he wished it, and *that* he will never do.'

He turned to the table and swept aside impatiently a number of little delicate models in brass and steel.

'I have been working for fortune, for *you*. These things may go now. I want nothing more for myself.'

'You will want it in time for some better woman than I am,' she said, so earnestly and so affectionately, that the tension was too strong for him, and tears fell from the hot, aching eyeballs.

‘No better woman, or worse woman, or woman of any kind, will ever come to Wingates as my wife if you give me up. I am not a young man, but until I met you I never knew what it was to think of a woman, or wish her to think of me, and I shall never do it again when you leave me.’

‘Think me an ungrateful fool—hate me!’

‘My dear, if I could do that, I should be a poor sort of fellow, not worthy of having won even so much regard from you as I have. Here, now’ (as she turned away with a heart-felt sob of sorrow, which was, perhaps, more for herself than for him),—‘here, now, we’ll say no more about it. Don’t let the last thing I do for you be to make you cry.’

' You are a good man, and a kind one. I will not hurt you more than I have done already. I will get out of your sight to-morrow, and I pray that you will soon put me out of your memory.'

' Gently, my dear. We must think of the others. If you go, your aunts will go, and how about poor little Mrs Harlby then? She can't stay here; at least people like Mrs Pollard may talk if she does.'

And is it necessary she should stay?'

' Till he is better, poor fellow; it would be hard to rob him of all his nurses at once; and he doesn't seem to have any relations to whom I could send.'

' No, he is a sadly, solitary man.'

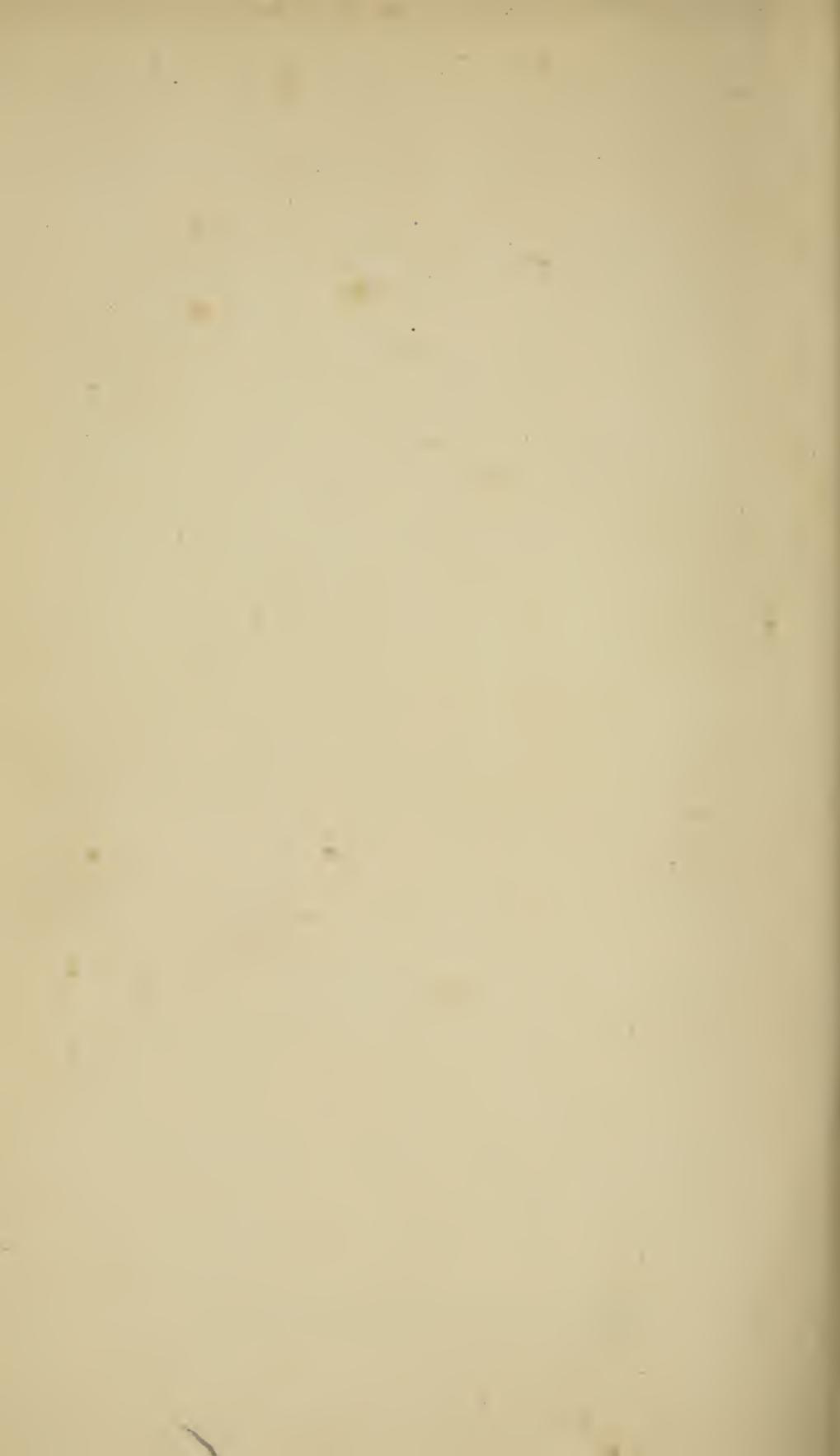
‘So, for his sake, you must stay here till he needs no more nursing, and try and feel that you are in the house of a man who will regard you as a sister, if you won’t let him regard you as anything nearer. I’ll not worry you, Frances. After to-night I will not put you to the pain of saying “No” to me again. But just once more to-night—is your reason for giving me up one that can *never* be got over?’

‘It is one that can never be got over, John; it is one that must cloud my life.’

She turned to go out of the room, and he held the door open, standing with his head so bowed as she passed, that her heart smote her, and spoke more warmly for him that it had ever done before.

'That's over! and I am more unhappy than I was before; but—I have done what is best for John Treville,' she kept on telling herself, even while she was trying to carry on the 'cosy chat' which her aunts always insisted on having with her before they went to bed.

END OF VOL. I.







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